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Satur(n⬥alic⬥i)a Regna: The Neronian Grotesque and the Satires of Seneca, Persiuis, and Petronius

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The Neronian Grotesque and the Satires of Seneca, Persius, and Petronius

by

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Abstract

Persius, Petronius, and Seneca are often seen as "satirizing" Nero. It's common to read satire as moral critique, and who better to criticize than (Suetonius and Tacitus' construction of) Nero? But looking at the satire from a non-classical perspective, that of Bakhtin's grotesque, leads to an interesting conclusion. These three satirists are in sync with the festive and aesthetic values of the Neronian court. Neronian era satire isn't "satirizing" Neronian culture; it's participating in it.

First I show there is a more balanced picture of the emperor, but scholars on Neronian era satire default to a questionable narrative with Nero as monster and fool and the satirists satirizing him through veiled references. Instead, I propose that Nero and his satirists are creating a new aesthetic based on grotesque principles rather than classical ones. The grotesque's symbolism of renewal suggests a renewal of the principate and the arts. I suggest that satire was the ideal vehicle for the literary embodiment of the grotesque aesthetic.

The *Apocolocyntosis* is prototypical of Neronian grotesque satire: its portrayal of Claudius' grotesque body, its interest in the lower registers of language, its debasement of Julio-Claudian traditions, and its celebration of Saturnalia. In the *Apocolocyntosis* Nero's promise of renewal of the principate and literature is represented as a Saturnalian return to the *Saturnia regna* of Augustus.

Persius continued this grotesque literary revolution. Judging Persius by the classical aesthetic leads to conclusions about his poetry's lack of beauty that point to criticism of Nero. I argue Persius is in tune with the Neronian program, and his

emphasis is on the grotesque revival of post-Augustan literature through his grotesque *iuncturae acres* and debasement of Horace.

Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis* too has been read as a satire on the Neronian age. I argue it is meant to be read as grotesque and Saturnalian; the negative commentary of its heroes serving as elite foil to the festive, freedman culture and to Trimalchio, the feast's *Saturnalius Rex,* constantly parodying elite culture. Part of that parody is a grotesque debasement of Augustan literature, principally through Trimalchio's parallels to Maecenas.

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Ultima vox eius haec inter homines audita
est, cum maiorem sonitum emisisset illa parte, qua facilius
loquebatur: "vae me, puto, concacavi me." Quod an fecerit,
nescio: omnia certe concacavit.
—Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis 4.2-3*

His last words among men were heard, when he had let loose a major blast from the end which he spoke more easily from: "Darn! I think I shit myself." Whether he did, I don't know: he sure shat everything else.

sede leges celsa, liquido cum plasmate guttur
mobile conlueris, patranti fractus ocello.
tunc neque more probo uideas nec uoce serena
ingentis trepidare Titos, cum carmina lumbum *20*
intrant et tremulo scalpuntur ubi intima uersu.
—Persius, *Satire 1, 17-21*

You'll read from your high chair, after you've rinsed your loosened throat with its fluent trill, wrecked by a cum-hither look. Then you'd see great Tituses shake, not so tight-assed any more, and not calm-spoken when the poems enter the pelvis, when they're tickled deep inside by the vibrating verse.

Itaque si quis vestrum voluerit sua re causa facere, non est quod
illum pudeatur. Nemo nostrum solide natus est. Ego nullum puto tam
magnum tormentum esse quam continere. Hoc solum [vetare] ne
Iovis potest. Rides, Fortunata, quae soles me nocte desomnem facere?
Nec tamen in triclinio ullum veto facere quod se iuvet
—Petronius, *Satyricon 47.4*

Therefore if any of you should wish to "approach the bench" it's nothing to feel embarrassed about. None of us was born solid. I think there's no torture so great as holding it in. This one thing even Jove himself can't do. You laugh, Fortunata? You're the one who keeps me up at night! As a matter of fact, I won't stop anyone from doing whatever he wants in the dining room.

Introduction: a *Satura Lanx* to Set the Table...

We have more projects in satire from the Neronian era than from any other. The fact that two of these satiric projects originated with leading members of Nero's court and literary circle indicates a greater interest in this "low" genre than perhaps at any other time during the principate. Why was the interest in satire so great during the reign of Nero, especially at the Neronian court?

Further, as indicated in the epigraphs above, all three satirists use a palette of imagery that incorporates ugly, non-ideal body types, scatology and other bodily functions as well as language ranging from colloquial to vulgar to a degree not seen before in Imperial Roman literature, including previous satire. There is not just an interest in satire, but in satire that sounds, looks and feels a certain way. Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* revolves around the monstrous figure of the recently-dead Claudius. His physical infirmities are emphasized as well as his capacity for foolishness combined with terror. Seneca parodies epic and tragedy and juxtaposes them alongside marketplace language, rancorous humor, and an explosively scatological end for the *princeps* himself. Persius' compact book of tangled verse satires is replete with disjointed images, misshapen bodies, disembodied organs; the language itself is virtually (and admittedly) deformed. Petronius' *Satyricon,* which unfolds the not-so-epic journey of a not-so-heroic fool through myriad episodes of sex, feasting, and disguise with a supporting cast drawn from the lower rungs of Roman society, has at its center the vulgar and bloated figure of the freedman Trimalchio, presiding over one of the great feasts of literature. The concentration of satiric forms and the shared palette of imagery and language in this one era are suggestive. There is more at play here than literary coincidence, and in this thesis I will argue that this indicates shared ideas and literary principles among the three authors.

Why are so many of the leading literary lights of the time interested in satire? Eschewing the easy and traditional answer, that Nero is the cause and the target of these satires, I will instead identify the common aesthetic that these satires share

and its place in the larger program of Nero's concept of the arts and of self-representation. I will make the case that the shared imagery and language of these three satirists, in their appropriation of popular imagery, language and themes, is the first flowering of what may be called the Neronian grotesque, as fully articulated and considered an artistic program as the Augustan classical program with which it often directly engages. Each of the three satirists writing under Nero of course has his own style and agenda, but the Neronian grotesque can be seen as an overarching aesthetic, present consistently in its representation of non-ideal, non-classical bodies, its interest in popular language and festive behavior--most notably in the license of the Saturnalia--and in its celebration of the rebirth of language and culture through engagement with and defeat of the now senile and exhausted forms of Augustan culture, the "orthodox exponents of an already stale tradition of preciosity," as Maes (2008: 316) calls them.

In this introductory chapter, I will begin with a look at both the traditional account of Nero's reign--the "go to" of so many critics of Neronian satire--and also some examinations of Nero and his principate which have run counter to the traditional wholesale adherence to Suetonius and Tacitus that has characterized much of the thinking about Nero. This is a necessary step, for I will be arguing that the satires of this age are part of the emperor's program, written to please him and to take part in Nero's artistic revolution. I will argue that, despite a sound foundation of scholarship that presents a balanced and even, at times, positive picture of Nero and his reign, the interpretation of Neronian era satire tends to rest on the default, traditional picture of Nero as a debauched megalomaniac and fool.

Next, I will briefly survey the scholarship on the genre of Roman satire--what it does and what it does not do. The focus here will be to highlight the scholarship on the genre that consistently demonstrates that satire before Juvenal was not principally moralizing or "satirizing" in the modern sense. I will then show that, where Nero is concerned, even critics who agree with that definition of the genre abandon it in favor of a default notion that Neronian satire must be "satirizing" in the sense of moral outrage. The ultimate goal of these two courses of inquiry is to call into question the still-current and deeply held opinion that Neronian era satire exists to satirize the Neronian era and Nero himself, and that the writing of satire under Nero was an act of opposition to the emperor's immorality and tyranny.

I will then set the stage for a description of Nero's artistic plans in general and, more specifically, in satire by adopting the lens of Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque. Bakhtin was writing about a specific time and a specific work of literature. Since then, his ideas about the grotesque have been adopted and adapted to fit a variety of different literary works and movements from different times and cultures. Bakhtin himself argues that the cultural phenomena on which his ideas of the (Rabelaisian) grotesque are based are timeless. At their most fundamental this should hold true, but literary manifestations of the grotesque will look different and have different goals each time. Looking back into the past from Bakhtin and from Rabelais, I will examine just how his ideas about the grotesque can be seen playing out in Neronian satire and in Nero's artistic program. I will develop a broad definition of the Neronian grotesque before moving on, in subsequent chapters, to

explore how these ideas play out in different ways with different emphases in each of the Neronian satirists.

Rethinking Nero, or not ...

> πολλοὶ γὰρ τὴν περὶ Νέρωνα συντετάχασιν ἱστορίαν, ὧν οἱ μὲν διὰ χάριν εὖ πεπονθότες ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ τῆς ἀληθείας ἠμέλησαν, οἱ δὲ διὰ μῖσος καὶ τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀπέχθειαν οὕτως ἀναιδῶς ἐνεπαρῴνησαν τοῖς ψεύσμασιν, ὡς ἀξίους αὐτοὺς εἶναι καταγνώσεως.
>
> --Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XX.154

> Many have composed history about Nero, some of whom, because of gratitude after being treated well by him, were careless of the truth, while others, out of hatred and hostility towards him, have so shamelessly reveled in lies that they deserve slight regard.

Josephus, a contemporary of Nero, makes an interesting point: there are *no* reliable historians when it comes to Nero. From a good-willed carelessness with the truth to a drunken orgy of lies (*ἐνεπαρῴνησαν* literally means to act drunkenly and offensively), the historical record is not to be trusted. For us, of course, only half of that record remains, the work of the Flavians, of Suetonius and Tacitus, and later of the Christians having effectively suppressed all but the barest traces of the positive tradition.[1] Acknowledging that what we are told about Nero isn't true is nothing new, but it is remarkable how much more traction the hostile tradition still holds over a more balanced look.

Several recent biographies of Nero have embraced that balanced look, without attempting to "rehabilitate" the emperor. Two things stand out from this approach that are relevant to a new look at Neronian satire: Nero was not an

[1] See Thornton (1973: 576-577).

unqualified monster, but in fact quite popular among some groups of people beyond the senatorial class; Nero's contribution to and patronage of the arts led to a second great flowering of the arts in Rome and to innovations that had a lasting effect on literature, the visual arts, and architecture. The problem with these pluses is that they are not reflected in the ancient writers of Neronian history, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio. Tacitus and Dio were both of senatorial rank and had served as consuls, and Suetonius was a high ranking equestrian and official to both Trajan and Hadrian. They were traditionalists, and Nero wasn't.

David Shotter's short biography of Nero is one that attempts to give credit where credit is due to the emperor, even though it still results in a fairly negative look at the emperor overall. He does, however, point out that Nero was quite popular with several groups outside the senatorial rank. Out in the provinces, most notably in the east, Nero generally had practiced good governance and, as indicated by the appearance of a false Nero in 88, Nero had a positive reputation.[2] More pertinent to this discussion is Nero's popularity with the non-senatorial classes at Rome. Anecdotes suggesting this popularity emerge even from the hostile sources: Suetonius (*Life of Nero*, 57) admits that, long after Nero died, people left flowers at his tomb and brought out his statues and edicts and placed them on the rostra. Tacitus (*Histories* 1.4) admits that there were those who were sorry to lose Nero, though he dismisses them as "plebs sordida et circo ac theatris sueta" (low-life commoners who'd gotten used to their racing and shows). Perhaps of even more weight is the fact that Otho, second in the line of short-lived emperors after Nero,

[2] Shotter (1997): for good governance of the provinces, pp. 35-40; for popularity in the east, p. 56, pp. 87-88.

thought the best way to legitimize his reign and ensure that the populace of Rome was behind him was to identify himself closely with Nero. Tacitus (*Histories* 1.78) reports that: "etiam de celebranda Neronis memoria agitavisse spe vulgum adliciendi" (he even stirred up celebrating Nero's memory in the hope of winning over the commoners) and that he was acclaimed by both the people and the military as "Nero Otho." Plutarch (*Otho* 3.1-2), quoting a source much closer to the time, reports that "Κλούβιος δὲ Ῥοῦφος εἰς Ἰβηρίαν φησὶ κομισθῆναι διπλώματα, (οἷς ἐκπέμπουσι τοὺς γραμματηφόρους), τὸ τοῦ Νέρωνος θετὸν ὄνομα προσγεγραμμένον ἔχοντα τῷ τοῦ Ὄθωνος" (Cluvius Rufus says that official documents were carried to Spain (by courier) which had the written name of Nero set beside that of Otho.) This is significant because it is an instance of Otho, in an official capacity, embracing the identification; this was not just a fancy of the common people. Plutarch adds that Otho stopped the practice because the senatorial class disapproved. Such hints lead a biographer like Shotter to attribute to Nero a degree of popularity, with at least the common people of Rome, that certainly speaks against the idea that he was a monster and that there were mass celebrations in the streets on his death.[3] "Nero's patronage of ordinary people," says Shotter (1997: 88), "particularly in the matter of building work and entertainment, left a strong impression and provides an echo of the divided reactions to the murder of Caesar a century earlier." Champlin (2003) takes a more radical direction with his biography in that he proceeds from a single, focused thesis: Nero was not insane, and many of the things that make him a "monster" in

[3] As Tacitus indicates in *Histories* 1.4.

Tacitus and Suetonius were choices that he made because they would be appealing not just to him personally but also to a broad constituency in Rome and the provinces. He does some interesting interpretation not just of little nuggets in the written record but also of material remains that indicate Nero was a good deal more popular than traditionalists give him credit for. A cameo portrait, for instance, which depicts Nero after his death, has all the iconography that typically indicates apotheosis (Figure 1). "Here the emperor is not just Nero the Hero;[4] he is Divus Nero, Nero the God" (32-33). Champlin (2003: 29) also debunks the idea that Nero "underwent something called *damnatio memoriae*, damnation of memory. He did not, and the term is incorrect and misleading in various ways." He notes that, while the senate had had him declared a public enemy in his final days, he had been given a regular funeral, his statues reappeared in the Forum after a brief time (Galba's reign), and his acts as emperor had not been reversed by the senate or the series of emperors that succeeded him. "His name might be, and sometimes was, erased from monuments, but, as with the destruction of his statues in the chaotic days after his death, such acts were outbursts of private zeal, not responses to public mandates." This is a striking contrast to the more traditional accounts of Nero that tend to stick to Tacitus' and Suetonius' construction of the emperor as monster. Compare for instance, the final words of Holland's (2000: 230) biography: "No Roman now proclaimed his divinity. His memory was officially damned, and his statues were removed from public places. The month of 'Neroneus' reverted to

[4] In the first chapter of his biography, "The Once and Future King," (1-35) Champlin sets out traditional criteria for folk heroism, relates some traditional examples, and demonstrates that Nero too fits these criteria.

being the month of April.[5] Less sensitive, more business-like men took over his Golden House[6] and his Empire. Rome no longer needed to fear being renamed Neropolis.[7]" He then follows with an epilogue titled "The Beast of the Apocalypse." The problem with Holland's traditionalist approach is that it only takes into account the written record, which consists of only hostile sources from one sub-group of Romans. That record and that hostility are genuine, but they are only a part of the picture. When that small piece becomes generalized ("no Roman ...") the idea of Nero as monster grows.

Perhaps the only positive aspect of Nero's principate that is widely acknowledged is the tremendous flourishing of the arts that took place during his reign. Things didn't end well for Nero, for many of the great writers of his reign, or for the Domus Aurea. It's important though not just to consider the end and not to let the end overshadow the positive achievements in this area. Miriam Griffin (1984: 119), in many ways a traditionalist in her approach to Nero, still acknowledges that "in order to do justice to the importance of Nero's artistic streak in the evolution of his Principate, we must consider more than its final manifestation, the Emperor singing and acting on the Roman stage before a terrified captive audience.[8] That Nero had a genuine passion for the visual, musical, and

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[5] Champlin (2003: 24) notes that inscriptional evidence suggests that the month was still called *Neroneios* in parts of the empire up into the third century.
[6] Otho, in one of his first moves as emperor, signed off on 50 million sesterces to finish the Domus Aurea.
[7] True, if that ever really was a plan. According to inscriptional evidence, though, a city in Cilicia kept the name *Neronias* on into the fourth century (Champlin, 2003: 24).
[8] Champlin (2003: 61, 66-68) takes issue with the notion that Nero's audiences were unwilling, coerced, and unhappy.

literary arts, emerges even from the prejudiced accounts of the historians." Again, traditionalists hearkening to the narrow view of Nero's later detractors often call this dedication into question, shifting the focus on the Domus Aurea, for instance, away from its architectural significance and labeling its construction a frivolous and selfish act (sometimes going along with the claim that Nero burned Rome to build it).[9] Likewise, traditionalists turn Nero's artistic interests into comical dilettantism and pretension, ignoring indications to the contrary even in the hostile sources.

Stepping away from Tacitus, Suetonius, and the Flavian[10] representation of the Domus Aurea as Nero's private pleasure palace, recent scholars have reconsidered the project and Nero's intentions, but even when acknowledging the importance of the Domus Aurea, it's easy to get pulled into the traditionalist view of Nero. Shotter (1997: 61) for instance acknowledges the significance of the building but then moves on to a flight of fancy: "its partial remains provide a sinister comment on the *princeps*. It consists now of a warren of corridors, many of them subterranean, and it was provided with 'false vistas' of the outdoor world through its wall decorations. The building and cryptoporticus ... suggest an emperor shunning his public and avoiding the daylight, alone in his megalomaniac world." Shotter here succumbs completely to a fictional construct, reading the Domus Aurea

[9] Darwall-Smith (1996: 36-37) says that "[Tacitus and Suetonius] would have us believe that Nero deprived the people of Rome of their homes in order to create a palace for his own private pleasure," but that the property Nero seized belonged to the "wealthy, members of an elite who could by their writings influence the posthumous reputation of a Nero." See Tacitus, *Annals* 15.42 and Suetonius *Life of Nero* 31.

[10] Griffin (1984: 137). See also Coarelli (2001: 197) who calls the Flavian replacement of Nero's lake with the Colosseum "un esempio tipico della politica demagogica di Vespasiano, che restituì al pubblico godimento le parti della città incluse da Nerone nella sua casa gigantesca."

as it *is*, rather than examining it as it *was* in Nero's day; his metaphor relies on an anachronistic reading of the structure.

Griffin (1984) offers a dissenting opinion to the idea that Nero wanted to "shun his public" by building an elaborate, private estate in the middle of the city. Noting Nero's overall rebuilding program for the city, she points out that the Domus Aurea contained or was adjacent to several public temples (to Fortune, to Jupiter Stator) and that the Sacra Via stopped at his "front door" (1984: 140). Other public and well-trafficked structures, such as the market Nero built on the Caelian and a warehouse, would seem to suggest a steady flow of traffic around and through the grounds.[11]

Building on Griffin's thesis that the complex was much less sequestered than generally believed (and than it was made out to be by Tacitus and Suetonius), Darwall-Smith (1996: 38) agrees that the picture of Nero selfishly stealing the center of the city to lock himself away in a private country villa is "overdrawn," citing the major traffic artery it would interrupt, the public shrines, and the nearby market. "Moreover, [Nero] is known to have given banquets for the people on the largest scale ... and the Golden House would provide a suitable setting for future

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[11] An interesting suggestion has also been made about the so-called "Baths of Titus:" that they are in fact a Neronian structure, judging by their orientation and their complementary relationship to the original grounds of the Domus Aurea (see Nielsen (1990: 46-47); Coarelli (2001: 223-224). Nielsen feels that the complex, if it was Neronian, was not open to the public, only to those working in the court. Champlin (2003: 207) suggests that the baths may have been intended for public use and that they were "intended as a strong and conscious echo of the very recent bath complex on the Campus Martius," but he admits the speculative nature of this interpretation. Nielsen also credits "Nero's brilliant architects" with innovations in the design of bath complexes (for their crowd-pleasing nature, cf. Martial *Epigrams* 7.34.4-5 "quid Nerone peius?/quid thermis melius Neronianis?")

events. Nero might see himself building a house where all the people of Rome could enjoy themselves with him." Thus we have potentially in the Domus Aurea a convergence of two of Nero's strengths: an artistic innovation, produced on a lavish scale, and one which provides him with a venue for generating the popularity he so enjoyed.

Champlin applies more recent archaeological finds about the lake that suggest this part of the complex was not a secluded faux-wilderness but rather a rectangular pool bordered by porticoes resembling the Stagnum Agrippae in the Campus Martius. "On this view, part of the Golden House was a clear image of one of the most public areas of Rome, an area where Nero meant to introduce the maritime pleasures of Baiae to the people of Rome" (2003: 207). Champlin's take on this public palace is interesting and original, for he suggests that what Nero's critics say about him was true, but misrepresented. Nero's turning the city into his house was not an act of selfish megalomania, but rather a populist and popular move to bond with the people of Rome: "The idea of the city as house *originated* with Nero, not with his critics, who turned a popular act into one of tyranny ... his intention thereby was not to *ex*clude the people, as his critics claimed. It was to *in*clude them. The *princeps* and the *populus Romanus* were *necessitudines*" (2003: 208). Champlin also sees the Golden House as playing a role in "Nero's fondness for consciously upsetting the hierarchies of Roman society, sharing pleasure with his people, staging at Rome riotous scenes of public license on sets reminiscent of a Campanian resort that was, until then, the playground of the rich" (2003: 209). Thus the Domus Aurea becomes a physical manifestation of Nero's practice of erasing the boundaries

between himself and the common people, a practice, of course, looked upon with disapproval by the writers of history. Tacitus (*Annals* XV.37) says that Nero "Ipse quo fidem adquireret nihil usquam perinde laetum sibi, publicis locis struere convivia totaque urbe quasi domo uti" (Nero himself, to obtain people's trust that nothing was as pleasant to him [as being at Rome], set up dinner parties in public places and used the whole city like it was his house). This follows a fairly cynical account of Nero's claim of familial bond with the people (it's an excuse to mask his superstitious abandonment of travel, perhaps brought on by guilt), the people's warm reception of it (because they want their free food and fun), and the grave misgivings of the Senate and the *primores*. Thus in Tacitus we see all the seeds for an interpretation of Nero's Domus Aurea the way Shotter (above) sees it. Extravagance, dissimulation, guilt, and megalomania color Nero's original populist/popular gesture, since it is filtered through the lens of the *primores*. There's no question even among the traditionalists that the Domus Aurea is a major achievement in both the decorative arts and especially in architecture. I will return to it again later in my discussion of Nero's overall artistic program. The point here is that the achievement, acknowledged by all, can be diminished by or overwritten with the picture of Nero as dissimulator and megalomaniac. Despite excellent scholarship to the contrary, the myth of the Domus Aurea as a selfish extravagance can still overwhelm the story of artistic triumph.

Another characterization of Nero and his devotion to the arts creates a comic rather than malevolent portrait of the emperor. He is portrayed as an incompetent dilettante, and this is particularly true when it comes to his literary pursuits. Of less

importance here is the assessment of his skill as a performer. Suetonius (*Life of Nero,* 20) tells us that he had a voice that was weak and husky and Dio (*History of Rome* 61.20.2) embellishes that report, making the emperor appear as a laughing stock: "καίτοι καὶ βραχὺ καὶ μέλαν, ὥς γε παραδέδοται, φώνημα ἔχων, ὥστε καὶ γέλωτα ἅμα καὶ δάκρυα πᾶσι κινῆσαι" (It's reported that he had a weak and unclear voice, with the result that he moved everyone to laughter and tears at the same time). This report also gets amplified by the much-documented competitiveness of Nero in performance contests and their inevitable outcome in his favor. On the other hand, Nero's voice is melodious in Sibylline Oracle 5.136-141:

> Ἑλλάδα τὴν τριτάλαιναν ἀναιάξουσι ποιηταὶ,
> Ἡνίκ᾽ ἀπ᾽ Ἰταλίης ἰσθμοῦ πλήξειε τένοντα
> Τῆς μεγάλης Ῥώμης Βασιλεὺς μέγας, ἰσόθεος φὼς,
> Ὅν, φασιν, ὁ Ζεὺς ἔτεκαν καὶ πότνια Ἥρη.
> Ὅστις παμμούσῳ φθόγγῳ μελιηδέας ὕμνους
> Θεατροκοπῶν, ἀπολεῖ πολλοὺς σὺν μητρὶ ταλαίνῃ.
>
> The poets will raise a cry of woe for triple-suffering Greece,
> When the great king of great Rome from Italy smites
> the ridge of the Isthmus, godlike in his nature,
> the one, they say, Zeus bore and queenly Hera.
> Courting applause for his honey-sweet songs with a voice suited to all music,
> He is the one who will destroy many along with his miserable mother.

This is perhaps not the most convincing of sources on its own, but Suetonius (*Life of Nero,* 39) includes a report that contradicts his own criticism of Nero's singing earlier: "Transeuntem eum Isidorus Cynicus in publico clara voce corripuerat, quod Naupli mala bene cantitaret, sua bona male disponeret" (When [Nero] was passing by, Isidorus the Cynic loudly ripped into him in public, because he sang about the troubles of Nauplius well, but disposed of his own goods poorly). Tacitus does not report on Nero's singing, but in his account of one of the false Neros at *Histories* 2.8

he says, "tunc servus e Ponto sive, ut alii tradidere, libertinus ex Italia, citharae et cantus peritus, unde illi super similitudinem oris propior ad fallendum fides" (At that time a slave from Pontus or, as others reported, a freedman from Italy, skilled at the lyre and at singing, because of this fact and his facial likeness to him had an easier time tricking people into believing him). Both versions of Nero's performing ability are about equally represented, but of course the version in which he is a poor singer and the object of ridicule is the one that is generally favored and far more well known to modern readers.

Nero gets a similar treatment when it comes to his literary pursuits. Tacitus (*Annals* 14.16) makes him a fraud:

> carminum quoque studium adfectavit, contractis quibus aliqua pangendi facultas necdum insignis erat. Hi cenati considere simul, et adlatos vel ibidem repertos versus connectere atque ipsius verba quoquo modo prolata supplere, quod species ipsa carminum docet, non impetu et instinctu nec ore uno fluens.
>
> He also affected an enthusiasm for poetry and got together some people who had some facility for composing but weren't yet famous. They would sit together after dinner and string together verses they'd brought or come up with right there and flesh out the words of the man himself one way or another; the very style of the poems tells us this: there's no vigor, no inspiration, and it's not coming from one source.

So, in Tacitus, Nero's artistic zeal is merely an affectation, and his poetry is at least partially plagiarized. The scholiasts and biographer of Persius, too, make their contributions to Nero's reputation as a bad poet, suggesting that Lucan ridiculed his

verses and that bad verses quoted by Persius in his first satire are by Nero.[12] By contrast we have Suetonius' documentary evidence of Nero's compositions:

> Itaque ad poeticam pronus carmina libenter ac sine labore composuit nec, ut quidam putant, aliena pro suis edidit. Venere in manus meas pugillares libellique cum quibusdam notissimis versibus ipsius chirographo scriptis, ut facile appareret non tralatos aut dictante aliquo exceptos, sed plane quasi a cogitante atque generante exaratos; ita multa et deleta et inducta et superscripta inerant. Habuit et pingendi fingendique non mediocre studium.
>
> *Life of Nero,* 52

> And so inclining towards versification he composed poetry readily and without effort and did not, as some think, publish others' as his own. Tablets and notebooks have come into my hands with some very famous poems written in his own handwriting, so that it's easy to see that they were not copied or taken from someone dictating, but clearly written and rewritten by the one who was thinking and generating it; there were so many things in it that were erased and crossed out and written above. He also had no small enthusiasm for painting and sculpture.

It's a rare occasion where Suetonius and Tacitus significantly part ways, and an even rarer one where Suetonius is defending Nero from his detractors. We also hear from Suetonius that Nero's poetry was very much enjoyed after his death by Vitellius (*Life of Vitellius,* 11) and that Suetonius himself seems to be familiar with it and expects others to be so as well (he references one of Nero's poems as if it were well-known). Servius, writing in the late fourth-early fifth century, references Nero's *Troica* in his commentaries on Vergil (*Aeneid* 5.370 and *Georgics* 3.36).

So, while the evidence for Nero as artist is something of a mixed bag, there seems to be more overall on the positive side. Recent biographers tend to come out

[12] This will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on Persius.

in Nero's favor on this subject, separating it out from the issues of propriety that so color Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio's accounts. The intensity of Nero's training and rehearsal, for instance, which in Suetonius are meant for shocking or comical effect, are read by many modern biographers as an indication of genuine interest and passion. Holland (2001: 150), one of the more traditional recent biographers, credits Nero with a "seriousness of approach to artistic endeavors." In the visual arts, Griffin (1984: 142) describes Nero as "an enthusiast who threw himself into grand projects and put at their service the latest Roman technology and the most advanced artistic ideas." She also devotes considerable ink (1984: 143-155) to Nero's "literary renaissance" and the very real contributions he made through patronage, concluding that, compared to his post-Augustan predecessors, "Nero's patronage affords a contrast in quantity and in kind. There is direct testimony from writers not only to his personal support but to the patronage of members of the senatorial class in favor with the emperor" (1984: 146). Holland (2001: 210) grants "rhythm and grace" to a surviving half-line quoted in (and also praised by) Seneca.[13] Champlin (2003) does not shy away from the distress that Nero's artistic leanings caused in some circles, nor from the fact that they were probably a serious distraction from the business of governing. "Yet, even so, there is a more positive side to this portrait of the artist that should not be overlooked. Nero was, undoubtedly, very serious about his art ... Concentrate rather on his ferocious energy, his passionate determination, and behind them his fecund imagination. Like it or not, Nero had a vision and, astonishingly, real strength of character" (2003: 82).

[13] "Colla Cytheriacae splendent agitata columbae..." in Seneca *Naturales Quaestiones* 1.5.6; Seneca compliments with the word "disertissime."

None of these biographers overlooks or justifies the shortcomings of Nero's principate or makes an attempt to fully rehabilitate Nero himself. What they all do, to varying degrees, is acknowledge the positives and separate the facts--what Nero did--from their hostile interpretation by Nero's post mortem political opponents. Yet this balanced look, this more comprehensive scholarship, vanishes when it comes time to discuss Neronian satire.

There is so much satire during the reign of Nero, the standard explanation goes, because the emperor deserves to be satirized for his excesses, for his political oppressions, his mercurial personality, his immorality, and for his pretensions as an artist: "what from one angle looks like an exciting new world of governance and good taste ... from another angle, Persius' angle, looks like nothing more than a cheap pornographic sideshow featuring Nero's outsized dick performing spectacular feats of penetration ... It's a jarring spectacle, hard to look at" (Freudenberg, 2001: 129). Freudenberg here not only takes the traditional tack on Nero, perhaps even more extreme than usual, but he tosses away scholarship to the contrary that has acknowledged Nero's better moments as a ruler and his important and positive patronage of the arts by relegating it to "one angle" (but not the one he'll be looking from, nor the one he's assigning to Persius). In this scenario, two of our three satirists live and work at court, Petronius and Seneca; they negotiate the dangerous waters of this mercurial regime through dissembling and flattery. This particular construct of Nero and his court is in fact the starting point for a tremendous amount of criticism and interpretation of Neronian era literature. This construct of Nero and his court is based primarily on a face-value reading of

historians and biographers like Tacitus and Suetonius, as well as other constructs of Nero in ancient literature, a reading that, as we have already seen, most recent scholarship qualifies, if not outright rejects.

It's an appealing story: the omnipotent, not-so-talented artist-emperor, super-sensitive to criticism, presiding over the leading intellectuals of his time who negotiate the treacherous and unpredictable swings of the boy-emperor's mood, alternately hiding their contempt and giving vent to it through thinly veiled "satire." The framework is there in Tacitus in particular, and the construct elaborated on and fleshed out through fiction and tradition over centuries. Rudich (1993: introduction, xxx) develops this picture of a volatile Nero and a court where no one dares to speak the truth perhaps to its fullest: "As a professed actor, prideful of his *dissimulatio*, he was capable of concealing a grudge for a long time, but eventually descended with vengeance upon the offender." In Rudich, Nero the artist and Nero the monster are born of the same impulse: *dissimulatio*. This is an elaboration of the running theme of dissimulation in the Principate in Tacitus' *Annals*. In Strunk's reading of Tacitus, "the Principate was based on a collective dissimulation, and its continued existence relied on all actors (princeps, senate, delatores, adulatores, and others) maintaining a certain façade" (2017: 108). Prominent as a theme in Tacitus, in Rudich's examination of the regime, dissimulation becomes the single note: "Seneca's habit of *dissimulatio* dominated all aspects of his relations with his pupil" (1993: 13). Persius, more of an outsider in Rudich's vision, is placed "firmly in the context of the 'moral opposition'" and Rudich asserts that "the first satire can be construed as an idiosyncratic, thinly disguised mask--by means of the dominant

metaphor, which identifies sexual profligacy with literary decadence--on the public and private preoccupations of the socialite and literati members of Nero's own camarilla" (1993: 62). As we have seen, this is Freudenberg's take on Persius, as well. Rudich goes a little further too: "[Persius] was fortunate to die, from natural causes, before the reign of terror reached its peak, although there is a belief that he might have been poisoned by Nero." The "belief," undocumented by Rudich,[14] does not even appear in the Suetonian *Vita* and is not widely entertained in scholarship on Persius, but it does fit logically into the construct of Nero and, in fact, highlights the fact that that construct is powerful enough to drive the scholarship.

Rudich's Petronius is most clearly an extrapolation from Tacitus. Beginning with Tacitus' brief account of Petronius at *Annals* XVI.18:

> De Petronio pauca supra repetenda sunt. Nam illi dies per somnum, nox officiis et oblectamentis vitae transigebatur; utque alios industria, ita hunc ignavia ad famam protulerat, habebaturque non ganeo et profligator, ut plerique sua haurientium, sed erudito luxu. Ac dicta factaque eius quanto solutiora et quandam sui neglegentiam praeferentia, tanto gratius in speciem simplicitatis accipiebantur. Proconsul tamen Bithyniae et mox consul vigentem se ac parem negotiis ostendit. Dein revolutus ad vitia, seu vitiorum imitatione, inter paucos familiarium Neroni adsumptus est, elegantiae arbiter, dum nihil amoenum et molle adfluentia putat, nisi quod ei Petronius adprobavisset.
>
> A few things further need to be gone over concerning Petronius. His day would be passed in sleep, his night in the social duties and enjoyments of life; and just as productivity had advanced others, so slacking had

[14] Most likely it derives from Léon Herrmann (1963), "Néron et la mort de Perse." In response, Anderson (1982: 7) is scathing: "Almost any innocent remark, political or otherwise, made by the earnest persona can be twisted into a sneer against Nero. The climax of such maunderings--at least, I hope it is--is the recent hypothesis by one of Belgium's most eminent Classicists that Nero had Persius poisoned!"

> brought him to fame, and he wasn't held to be a pig or out of control, like so many of those who exhaust their means, but as a man whose understanding of the good life had reached the level of a scholar. His words and his deeds were pretty loose and suggested a certain willingness to let himself go, so much so that they were accepted more graciously due to the appearance of openness. Still, as proconsul of Bithynia and soon consul he showed himself to be vigorous and up to the work. Then, returning to his vices--or the illusion of vices--he was admitted among the select few of those close to Nero, as arbiter of elegance, until he, in all his superfluity of pleasures, thought nothing was elegant and fine except what Petronius recommended to him.

From here Rudich elaborates, quite openly in fact: "an imaginative reader can easily extend, or complete, the picture and envision 'the arbiter of elegance,' admitted into the exclusive Imperial 'club' for his 'imitation of vices,' as playing the part of a keen observer intent on minute details, scribbling pointedly in his secret scrap book, and planning the creation of a social comedy or biting satire, largely for his own satisfaction" (1993: 154). He ultimately concludes that "Petronius took deliberate aim at the corruption and debasement of the emperor for the purpose of secret mockery--a dangerous game" (1993: 155). Rudich's book isn't about these satirists or about Neronian literature. It's about the pervasive practice of dissimulation at Nero's court by the emperor and by those around him; Persius, Seneca, and Petronius are simply part of that construct of Nero's court. That construct is principally based on Tacitus, a source that goes essentially unquestioned when this is the picture of the Neronian court a hostile historian wants to paint.

Despite recent efforts to offer a more balanced view, the traditional view of Nero as monster persists, especially when Nero is the "background," as he is in the study of Neronian literature. That both Suetonius and Tacitus construct Nero

rhetorically using a variety of tropes from oratory and literature has been well-established as a counterpoint to earlier acceptance of these authors as authoritative sources; however, it's hard to let go of the Neronian sky-scraper of depravity whose foundations were laid by these two authors, even while other emperors and their treatment get a re-evaluation that becomes part of the conversation.

Of the two principal sources, Suetonius is generally deemed less reliable than Tacitus. He is certainly hostile to his subject, as Bradley (1978: 14) notes in his introduction to his commentary on Suetonius' *Life of Nero*: "Suetonius has a decided opinion on the character of Nero and the bulk of the biography is designed to illustrate his *immanitas naturae*." It is also worth noting the commonly observed decline in quality of the later imperial lives compared to the earlier *Divus Iulius* and *Divus Augustus*;[15] the *Nero* is not Suetonius' best work in terms of accuracy, though Bradley (1978: 19) notes that the *Nero* "is generally recognized as his finest piece of sustained composition." It is a compellingly written, inaccurate look at Nero, and that is a dangerous combination. What makes Suetonius so readable and creates the lasting impression of Nero as depraved is in large part the vivid detailing of Nero's supposed sexual exploits. That's pretty clearly what's dominating Freudenberg's picture of Nero.[16] Krenkel (1980), however, takes the lurid sexual narratives of the different emperors in Suetonius and places them side-by-side, along with similar

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[15] See Townend (1967: 88-91); Wallace-Hadrill (1984: 61-63).

[16] It is worth considering that Freudenberg is using the traditional portrait of Nero rather than being influenced by it. The monstrously immoral "pornographic sideshow" he paints serves his reading of Persius and of satire in general. Freudenberg may be counting on the deeply entrenched tradition of Nero to further his thesis, assuming his reader would not question his depiction of Nero given the weight of convention.

examples from the *Historia Augusta*. The formulaic nature of these anecdotes is telling and demonstrates dramatically that these incidents are not necessarily factual at all, but literary *topoi*, parallels of which exist in literature and in political invective. Krenkel's conclusion should serve as a caution against believing such stories at all: "Sex und politische Propaganda gehörten in Griechenland, besonders aber im antiken Rom, zusammen. Durch Unterstellungen sollte der Gegner geschädigt werden. Derartige Aussagen sind topoi und sollten nicht für bare Münze genommen werden" (1980: 76). Tamsyn Barton (1994: 58) takes the idea that Suetonius is working with *topoi* further and unravels the rhetorical *topoi* used by Suetonius to create the impression of Nero's cruelty as well, citing literary and rhetorical precedents from Cicero through Polemo: "Clearly the acceptability of this sort of elaboration on standard lines poses problems for historians hoping to extract kernels of truth from Suetonius. The tradition should not be taken on trust." That tradition, however, looms large and frequently overshadows more balanced attempts at truth extraction.

At *Life of Nero*, 26.1, Suetonius begins his portrait in earnest: "Petulantiam, libidinem, luxuriam, avaritiam, crudelitatem sensim quidem primo et occulte et velut iuvenili errore exercuit, sed ut tunc quoque dubium nemini foret naturae illa vitia, non aetatis esse" (He practiced wildness, lust, extravagance, greed, cruelty, indeed gradually at first and secretly, and as if he was just a misguided youth but to the extent that at that time too there could be no doubt for anyone that these were defects of his nature, not his age). Suetonius' interest is in character, which he believes to be immutable. Nero's character flaws are consistent, if at times, early on,

concealed. Hägg (2012: 229) suggests that Suetonius, in writing about Nero, "has found mostly negative facts to record, and is perhaps also ... guilty of some manipulation in his selection--he was definitely not kindly disposed towards the man." The belief that Nero's character was consistently, immutably bad drives the work and creates a monolithic character that was born bad and died badly. Suetonius made up his mind about the character of a man, the character he wanted to present, and combined fact and fiction to create that character: "the value of his (fictional) material for portraying the subject as he sees him simply outweighed its dubiousness" (Power, 2016: 238). It's not that Suetonius is an indiscriminate or careless scholar, then. Rather, he is a scholar with a rhetorical purpose in mind--a purpose that transcends factual accuracy in favor of an accurate portrayal of a character as he wants it portrayed. Helping him to achieve this, aside from occasionally "dubious" material, is the technique he uses to present his biography, creating rubrics for character and arranging examples according to them rather than arranging events chronologically. Wallace-Hadrill (1984: 161) is clear as crystal:

> Suetonius is out to prove Nero a monster, not to understand the problems involved, and so he conjures up this image of universal destruction. He suppresses the severe doubts about Nero's responsibility for the fire. He deliberately plays down the political element: Britannicus was murdered because he had a better singing voice as well as constituting a threat (33.2); his mother because she nagged (34.1); and the prefect of Egypt, Caecina Tuscus, because he took a dip in the baths especially built for Nero's visit (35.5).

The result in the *Life of Nero* is an irresistible impression that Nero was always the same and always universally loathsome. This does much to account for

Freudenberg's colorful depiction of Nero quoted above. Even though Persius was not alive much beyond the "Golden Quinquennium" of good rule at the beginning of Nero's reign, Freudenberg's Nero is that of Suetonius--lustful, wild, and extravagant even at the beginning of his reign; anything else is a dissembling veil pierced by the sharp eye of the satirist. Similarities in Suetonius' picture of Nero and in Tacitus are generally agreed to be the result of common source material, including Nero's *libido*. Suetonius is consistently more lurid, and Bradley (1978: 154) notes that "Suetonius tends to embellish where Tacitus is more sober and discreet ... the absence in Suetonian biography of a moralizing element explains this difference." Suetonius' embellishments have the unpremeditated effect, then, of lending greater credibility to his near-contemporary Tacitus. If Tacitus chooses not to relate a detail found in Suetonius, then the details he does relate must be the more genuine, chosen more soberly and discreetly.

But Tacitus himself is not merely a dispassionate recorder of events. Joan-Pau Rubiés (1994: 35) lays out the problem that will plague the study of Neronian era literature long after it plagues the study of Nero: "The great paradox concerning Tacitus is that almost all commentators agree on the fact that his success as a historian is a result of his supreme skill as a rhetorician. How Tacitus can be both the supreme rhetorician and the reliable source has hardly been explained." Tacitus is a moralizer, interested in chronicling the degradation of the patrician class under imperial rule: "converso statu neque alia re Romana, quam si unus imperitet, haec conquiri tradique in rem fuerit, quia pauci prudentia honesta ab deterioribus, utilia ab noxiis discernunt, plures aliorum eventis docentur" (Now that the way things used to

be has been overturned and the Roman government is nothing other than one man giving the orders, it could be beneficial for these things to be looked into and passed on, since only a few distinguish between right and wrong, good and harmful, by their own judgment; more are instructed by what happens to others) (*Annals* 4.33). Tacitus is writing a drama of continuing decline--moral and political--of the once ruling class of Rome. Mellor (1995: 122) sums it up nicely: "Tacitus was a pessimist: his extraordinary mastery of tragic tone, theatrical characterization, and dramatic technique combine to make him the greatest tragedian of ancient Rome." As the final emperor in this dramatic chronicle, Nero must be the worst, and the patrician class must reach bottom at the climax of the tragedy. Tacitus had a point to make, and he shaped his historical material to make that point, says Rubiés (1994: 39): "Tacitus chose and arranged material which was often already in the form of a historical narrative, and then rewrote it with a personal rhetorical skill appropriate to his particular moral vein. The Nero that emerges is not just the negation of a conception of imperial office based on the Roman values of public service--more dramatically, it represents the ultimate degradation." Rubiés' reading of Tacitus is a sound one, but not new. Readers of Tacitus have long understood his rhetorical and dramatic approach, and his moral purpose is stated in the *Annals*. The reason that the readings of Rubiés and Mellor recur--that their point needs to be made continually--is that this understanding of Tacitus is often put on hold when it comes to Nero. The drama of Tacitus is indelible, like the character created by Suetonius.

An interesting case study is Ronald Syme's 1958 *Tacitus*. Syme clearly admires Tacitus, but this does not preclude a reading of the historian that allows for

his shortcomings--he just doesn't believe that those shortcomings should be dwelled upon exclusively (1958: volume I, 430). For example, Syme acknowledges that the portrait of the "Tacitean Tiberius" is "variously vulnerable" (1958: I, 420). Syme proceeds to offer a nuanced reading of Tacitus' portrait that admires the integrity of the historian while pointing out various obstacles (not the fault of Tacitus himself) to a completely accurate representation of the emperor. For example, in discussing Tacitus' portrait of Tiberius as a dissembler, Syme (1958: I, 421) notes that "the way of thought of the ancients was prone to conceive a man's inner nature as something definable and immutable ... if Tiberius at the end stood revealed as a bad man and a tyrant, it was legitimate to ask how and when the faults of his character, which previously had been curbed by discipline or disguised as craft, at last came to the surface." Syme's own take on Tiberius as opposed to his Tacitean incarnation is balanced:

> Tiberius Caesar showed consummate ability as a ruler--and he had need to be vigilant if he wished to introduce an unwonted freedom of debate ... Piso was Tiberius' choice, an old friend. Yet Piso had to be thrown over. The thing was managed. Discovering signal merit and loyalty in his minister Aelius Seianus, Tiberius committed himself imprudently. He drew back in time. (I, 429)

That is a measured and balanced reading of the Tacitean tradition that seems to be corrective. Ultimately, Tacitus in Syme's view does his best, but succumbs to the hostile tradition already built for Tiberius. Tacitus may be forgiven because he is more thorough, more accurate, than anybody else: "Tacitus went to the documents, and he was a skeptical inquirer. Convention and tradition proved too strong for

him. Otherwise his Tiberius might have been wholly acceptable--less literary and more complex, closer to history, and in the end more tragic" (1958: I, 430).

Yet, when it comes to Nero, Syme does not continue to apply the same filters to his reading of the historian. After a similarly balanced look at Claudius, Syme arrives at the final Caesar treated in the *Annals* and immediately falls in step with the hostile tradition, offering no counter-point whatsoever:

> Not much need be said about the personality of Nero, no item where the credit and veracity of Cornelius Tacitus can be seriously impugned ... What has been transmitted by Suetonius and Cassius Dio shows a remarkable concordance--save that Tacitus omits the grosser enormities and suspends judgment where those authors are cheerfully or ignorantly assertive. The concordance has been ascribed to the influence of a single dominant source, used by all three. A better explanation serves: the portrayal of Nero corresponds in large measure with the facts. (I, 437)

The difference is striking. Where Tacitus the documentarian was overwhelmed by a hostile tradition in his portrait of Tiberius, that possibility is not at any moment considered here. Indeed, the idea of a dominant source is dismissed out of hand.[17]

[17] From the more general to the particular, Syme's (1958: I, 416) take on Nero in his discussion of a "very peculiar episode" (an issue of taxation) at *Annals* 13.50 is illuminating. The sarcasm he shows, directed both at Nero and at scholars who would, perhaps, give him his due, is remarkable. Even where Tacitus is characterizing Nero as relatively reasonable, "convention and tradition" dominate Syme's reading. Syme's dismissal of a reexamination of Nero's statesmanship as deserving no countenance is surprising given his willingness to reevaluate Tiberius. One of the scholars dismissed by Syme, B.W. Henderson, made his point in 1903. A little more than a century later, the same take on Nero's policy is put forward by David Shotter (2005: 26),

However Nero's reign may have ended, it began with promise and celebration. There was, even to hear Suetonius tell it, an overwhelming sense of optimism:

> ex Augusti praescripto imperaturum se professus, neque liberalitatis neque clementiae, ne comitatis quidem exhibendae ullam occasionem omisit. Graviora vectigalia aut abolevit aut minuit. Praemia delatorum Papiae legis ad quartas redegit. Divisis populo viritim quadringenis nummis senatorum nobilissimo cuique, sed a re familiari destituto annua salaria et quibusdam quingena constituit item praetorianis cohortibus frumentum menstruum gratuitum. Et cum de supplicio cuiusdam capite damnati ut ex more subscriberet admoneretur: "quam vellem," inquit, "nescire litteras." Omnes ordines subinde ac memoriter salutavit. Agenti senatui gratias respondit: "Cum meruero." Ad campestres exercitationes suas admisit et plebem declamavitque saepius publicae; recitavit et carmina, non modo domi sed et in theatrum; tanta universorum laetitia, ut ob recitationem supplicatio decreta sit.
>
> (*Life of Nero* 10)

> He proclaimed that he would rule in the model of Augustus, and he missed no opportunity for generosity or mercy or even demonstrating his friendliness. He either abolished or lowered the heavier taxes. He reduced the informants' rewards under the Papian law to a quarter of what they had been. To the people he distributed four hundred gold pieces per person and to each senator, most noble but made poor by family affairs he settled on an annual salary (for some five hundred gold pieces) and likewise on a free monthly grain distribution to the praetorian guards. And when he was instructed to sign, as was the custom, the order of execution of some criminal, he said, "How I wish I did not know how to write." He greeted men of every order immediately and from memory. When the Senate voted him thanks he answered, "When I am deserving." He admitted even the plebeians to his exercises on the campus and declaimed in public very often; he even recited poems, not only at home but even in the theater; everyone's enjoyment was so great that a thanksgiving was decreed for the recitation.

Even tempering this account to allow for a rhetorical flourish of dramatic irony, it may still be assumed that there was an air of excitement after Nero's accession. His

birth was far superior to that of Claudius, linking him directly to the *sine qua non* himself, Augustus. Allowing for some correction again, Claudius was not a popular figure by the end of his reign (if ever), and the series of executions that punctuated his reign throughout no doubt left at least a certain stratum of Rome weary of fear and death: "After a long period of what was a rule of terror, Nero's accession was heralded enthusiastically as the dawn of the Golden Age, and there is no reason to doubt that much of this enthusiasm was genuine" (Rudich, 1993: 4); "much of Nero's early success derived from his being the direct descendant of Augustus (his great-great-grandson) and the clear 'Julian' solution to Rome's mostly 'Claudian' problems (Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius)" (Freudenberg, 2001: 128). The reigns of Tiberius, Gaius (Caligula), and Claudius had not been what Rome was hoping for. So here was another chance: a young emperor with a pedigree and the common touch. Even Nero's detractors tend to agree that the reign started out well, even if they give most of the credit to Seneca and Burrus, and of course there is Trajan's assessment recorded in Aurelius Victor (5.2): "Traianus saepius testaretur procul differre cunctos principes Neronis quinquennio" (Trajan frequently declared that all emperors were far behind Nero's five years).[18] These first five years were certainly those during which Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* and Persius' *Satires* were being written. Petronius' work cannot easily be dated, but its size and scope certainly

[18] Of course, Trajan (or Aurelius Victor) doesn't say which five years of Nero's reign is meant here; the first five are generally assumed, though arguments have been made for the middle five: Hind, (1971 and 1975); and the last five: Anderson (1911) and Thornton (1973) as well. However, Thornton (1989) withdraws her support of the final five years and reconfirms the traditional view that the first five years were meant by Trajan.

suggest a lengthy period of composition, perhaps beginning in these early years as well, since he had risen high enough in Nero's estimation to serve as consul in 60.[19]

For at least a century, there have been scholars taking a second look at the reign of Nero and the classical authors who have told us about it. Whether or not Nero ought to be redeemed isn't the point here; the point is that, where Nero is concerned, even a reader as balanced and informed as Syme is inclined to turn off the critical faculties once Nero's name is put forward. It is a natural instinct despite credible scholarship to the contrary. I argue that the same is true of scholars like Freudenberg reading Neronian era satire.

Instead of enjoying a satirical smirk, it might be worthwhile to pause and take a look at the context in which these satires were being produced from a different, less Tacitean perspective. Attempting a reading of Neronian era satirists without the pre-conceived (or -ordained) notion that satire written in the time of Nero must be anti-Neronian because it is satire can yield radically different and, ultimately, more coherent results. To begin, the way it all ended ought to be pushed into the background. Satire was primarily a spring and summer fruit of the reign of

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[19] Rose has what is generally believed to be the authoritative word on the date of the Satyricon, setting the "*terminus post quem"* at 65 (1971: 68). One of the tools that he uses for this is an analysis of echoes with Seneca's *Epistles*, the date for which he sets at 62-65 (1971: 70). However, it is worth noting that "since Seneca says the Lugdunum disaster occurred one hundred years after the city's foundation, the date of *Ep*. 91 should be 58 A.D." (1971: 71). I don't think there is a need to dispute dates of "publication"; rather, I think there is a very real possibility that the reference to an event from 58 and its echo in Petronius could both be the result of earlier composition work. Both writers were among Nero's familiars, and it is reasonable to assume that Petronius could have been privy to earlier writings by Seneca that were eventually incorporated into Seneca's published *Epistles*. Petronius could have been working on the *Satyricon* and picking up on Senecan references earlier than Rose's date.

Nero, and at the beginning the mood was festive. I propose that the satire of Nero be read in this festive spirit, this sense of a new beginning. By adopting and adapting Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque, I suggest the choice of satire at the beginning of Nero's reign is a natural one for very different reasons than the ones usually assumed, and that the reading of those satires through a grotesque lens makes them funnier and more coherent.

Bakhtin and the Grotesque

Bakhtin elaborates his theory of grotesque realism, which I shall refer to simply as the grotesque, most thoroughly in his work *Rabelais and his World*. In this work, Bakhtin argues that the grotesque imagery and language in Rabelais' works constitute an entirely separate system from the "classical" aesthetic of official culture; it is a system that challenges, debases, and laughs at the official, classical aesthetic. This is a key point at which Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque differs from most: the grotesque as an aesthetic is a resistance to official culture. Writing about Rabelais, Bakhtin sets his grotesque imagery in play against the intellectual fear inspired by the culture of the "Gothic age, with its one-sided seriousness based on fear and coercion ... this point of view tended to underwrite the static, unshakable hierarchy" (1968: 268). It is this challenge to "official culture" through the adoption of a popular and festive aesthetic that sets Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque apart from so many others, and it is this aspect that I believe is also applicable to satire in the Neronian age.

For Bakhtin, Rabelais and his grotesque aesthetic have thwarted interpretation because so often modern readers lack the background to understand grotesque imagery. This imagery, he argues, is rooted in the popular-festive humor marginalized from official, classical culture. The key to Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque is humor: the grotesque promises rebirth and fruitfulness through laughter, and that laughter is generated through an adoption of popular imagery, language, and themes. Bakhtin proceeds to detail the sources for this humor and imagery: popular-festive culture, rooted in carnival and other popular feasts; a non-classical approach to the body as incomplete, penetrable, and constantly engaged in a cycle of death and birth often represented by images of the material bodily lower stratum; and marketplace humor, language, and abuse.

Bakhtin's work has been enormously influential since the second half of the twentieth century. It has also been controversial. Bakhtin's pronouncements can at times seem a bit oracular, and his need to establish carnival and the grotesque as an eternal, unbroken stream from antiquity leads him to create monoliths where more specificity is often desired. Ironically, Bakhtin's ideas about the grotesque reject "completion," and insist on constant change and renewal; he denies that of the system itself. Therefore I shall take Bakhtin's theories in general as Victoria Rimell (2005: 165) does his description of Menippean satire: "Bakhtin is merely sketching an idiom: it must be taken for granted that the set of categories are descriptive rather than prescriptive, that no text will necessarily include all elements, especially as the idiom is to operate transhistorically." Bakhtin observed a phenomenon in literature, most especially in literature by a single author, and crafted a convincing

reading of that literature that was counter to its traditional reading. I propose to do the same for Neronian satire, using Bakhtin's ideas and observations as a guide.

Others have offered their own theoretical interpretations of the grotesque. Another influential modern approach was that of Kayser,[20] *Das Groteske: seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung* (1957). Kayser's focus is on more modern literature and art[21] than what Bakhtin deals with, and his vision of the grotesque is dark:

> Bei aller Ratlosigkeit und allem Grauen über die dunklen Mächte, die in und hinter unserer Welt lauern und sie uns entfremden können, wirkt die echte künstlerische Gestaltung zugleich als heimliche Befreiung. Das Dunkle ist gesichtet, das Unheimliche entdeckt, das Unfaßbare zur Rede gestellt. Und so ergibt sich eine letzte Deutung: *die Gestaltung des Grotesken ist der Versuch, das Dämonische in der Welt zu bannen und zu beschwören.*
> (1957: 202)

Kayser observes many of the same elements in the grotesque as Bakhtin, but instead of finding laughter in the contradictions of the imagery Kayser stares into a dark abyss and finds alienation and terror (1957: 53). The fear inspired by the "ugliness" and inside-out world of the grotesque is a reaction from the point of view of official, classical culture. Kayser seems almost to read the grotesque as an exercise in psychology: the demonic is called forth by the grotesque image in an attempt to master it. There are significant differences between Bakhtin's theory and

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[20] Victor Hugo's ideas about the grotesque in his preface to *Cromwell* (1827) are still relevant as well; as recently as 1982 Johnson used them principally as his model for *Synge: the Medieval and the Grotesque*, though Johnson refers to Bakhtin on the grotesque body several times as well.

[21] Kayser (1957: 202): "Drei Epochen heben sich heraus, in denen, so dürfen wir schließen die Macht des <<Es>> besonders eindringlich empfunden werde: das 16. Jahrhundert, die Zeit zwischen dem Sturm und Drang und der Romantik, und die Moderne."

those like Kayser's:[22] Bakhtin locates the origins of the grotesque in popular-festive culture, and he always reads the grotesque as reflective of a spirit of laughter and renewal. I will demonstrate that these two defining characteristics of Bakhtin's theory are present in and crucial to Neronian era satire. Beginning with a survey of Bakhtin's ideas about the grotesque that I believe are pertinent to the reading of Neronian era satire, I will then move on to a description of what I believe to be a Neronian program of aesthetics and self-representation that is grotesque in its own, specific way.[23]

According to Bakhtin's theory, the grotesque, in any of its incarnations, is essentially rooted in popular imagery, festival, and language. Bakhtin starts from the grotesque painting of Nero's Domus Aurea (and the renaissance painting style it inspired) but, in terms of his literary theory of the grotesque, says that the type of painting that gave its name to the grotesque is only "a fragment of the immense world of grotesque imagery which existed throughout all the stages of antiquity and continued to exist ..." (1968: 32). Bakhtin posits an aesthetic based, essentially, on

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[22] See Rosen (1991: 125-128) for a more detailed comparison; also Harpham (1982: 71-74) who says that Bakhtin "bluntly contradicts Kayser at every possible point" (71). Bakhtin (1968: 46-52) himself addresses Kayser's theory: "Kayser's definitions first of all strike us by the gloomy, terrifying tone of the grotesque world that alone the author sees. In reality gloom is completely alien to the entire development of this world up to the romantic period" (1968: 47). On the other hand, Maes (2008: 319-320) feels the two theories are actually reconcilable through the ambivalence that is a natural feature of the grotesque.

[23] Many genres and literary periods have been examined through the lens of the grotesque, e.g.: Rhodes (1980) *Elizabethan Grotesque*; Johnson (1982) *Synge: the Medieval and the Grotesque*; Hollington (1984) *Dickens and the Grotesque*; Clark (1992) *The Modern Satiric Grotesque*. All of these use and address Bakhtin's theories on the grotesque, while also pointing out their difficulties. More recently, classicists have begun to consider classical works in relation to Bakhtin; see *Bakhtin and the Classics* (2002), R. Bracht Branham, ed.

all popular modes of expression, language, and art that have been left out of the aesthetic vocabulary of "official culture"--an aesthetic opposed to that culture and serving as a sort of catch-all for any mode of expression excised from official culture to "the marketplace." As such, the grotesque is a bit of a hodgepodge, a *satura lanx* of symbols, vocabularies, images, and sources, yet with unifying principles.

The first component of Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque that I believe may also be applied to Neronian satire is carnival and popular-festive imagery. Here I will both highlight the points Bakhtin makes about carnival that I believe are important to understanding Neronian satire and attempt to set the concept in a Roman context through a look at what Bakhtin himself considers carnival's precursor, Saturnalia. In *Rabelais and his World* (1968), Bakhtin at times will use carnival as an adjective as a virtual synonym for grotesque and also use it as more directly referring to the festival. In this thesis, carnival and Saturnalia will directly refer to those festivals, and grotesque will indicate the overarching symbols, imagery, and language. Bakhtin's ideas about carnival focus on three key elements: the idea of ambivalence, of life and death being contained within the same body (influenced by the idea of carnival and other festivals like it as agricultural rituals); the idea of constant, dynamic change produced by that ambivalence, resulting in incomplete, mutable forms and inversions of "norms;" and the idea that this understanding results in laughter and a conquest of fear:

> During the century-long development of the medieval carnival, prepared by thousands of years of ancient comic ritual, including the primitive Saturnalias, a special idiom of forms and symbols was evolved--an extremely rich idiom that expressed the unique yet complex carnival experience of the people. This

> experience, opposed to all that was ready-made and completed, to all pretense at immutability, sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever changing, playful, undefined forms. All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the "inside out" (*à l'envers*), of the "turnabout," of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a "world inside out." We must stress, however, that the carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. (1968: 10-11)

Saturnalia in its belief and its rituals is the proto-ritual that Bakhtin imagines existing in his eternal continuum of the popular festive spirit before the Christian carnival. His description of Saturnalia, when he describes it at all, is a shadowy description of carnival by another name, and the only source he cites for it is Macrobius (1968: 198), though he demonstrates great familiarity with Lucian throughout the work. Since Saturnalia needs to be more than just background if we are to understand Roman satire of the Neronian age through a grotesque lens, it's worth looking at the festival in a little more detail.

On the surface, it is easy to see why Bakhtin would make the assertion that carnival is a continuation of Saturnalia without feeling the need to support such a statement. Like Bakhtin's carnival, Saturnalia's stand-out feature in many sources is its inversion of societal norms, its (temporary) topsy-turvy restructuring of class and convention in which slaves are free to speak their minds and criticize their

masters,[24] fools serve as kings (or emperors)[25] and the lowest of the low feast and play alongside their betters.[26] The most popular image of Saturnalia, in fact, is probably that of household slaves being served dinner by their masters, just the kind of image that suggests the type of topsy-turvy temporary social inversion that Bakhtin finds central to carnival and its spirit. It's worth noting, though, that in many ways Saturnalia is as much about blurring or eliminating the strata of society as inverting it. Lucian (*Saturnalia* 7) says as much through Cronus himself: "ἀπανταχοῦ κρότος καὶ ᾠδὴ καὶ παιδιὰ καὶ ἰσοτιμία πᾶσι καὶ δούλοις καὶ ἐλευθέροις. οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἐπ᾽ ἐμοῦ δοῦλος ἦν" (everywhere there's clapping and singing and kidding around and equal esteem for all, both for slaves and the free, for no one was a slave under me). The stereotypical image of the master serving supper to his slaves, such as can be seen in Macrobius' *Saturnalia*[27] 1.12.7, may be the type of inversion Bakhtin is talking about, but more commonly the masters and slaves shared the meal as equals.[28] The leveling of social strata is likewise evident in typical Saturnalian attire: during the holiday, everyone wore (or at least could

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[24] Bernstein (1987: 455-456) makes the worthwhile point that literary Saturnalias (as opposed to the actual festivals) tend to favor this one aspect above all others. He is concerned specifically with Horace's use of Saturnalia in *Sermones* 2.7.
[25] Brugnoli (1984: 51-52) raises questions about how significant this aspect of Saturnalia really was. However, to make his point he is forced to write off its use in the *Apocolocyntosis* with the somewhat unconvincing argument that Claudius was a Saturnalian king only because his reign was one long Saturnalia. Lucian (*Saturnalia* 9) has Cronus himself calling for election of a Saturnalian king: "βασιλέας χειροτονῶμεν" (let's vote for kings).
[26] Nilsson (1921: 204-205).
[27] Macrobius actually offers three variants on the feast. Besides the one noted above, in which master serves slave, we have a shared feast at 1.10.22, and at 1.24.23 slaves and masters dine separately but the feast is of the same quality and the slaves get to eat first.
[28] See Brugnoli (1984: 50-51).

choose to wear) the pileus, the conical hat of a freed slave. This tradition, in a culture in which social status was worn around the neck, over the shoulder, and on the border of a garment, should not be underestimated as a statement of the festival's meaning. Romans were trained to react to a person based on what he was wearing (the color of a garment, the breadth of a stripe, etc.); the *pileus* worn by all would have had a dramatic effect on social interaction during the holiday period. Clothes made the men, and, during Saturnalia, clothes made them all equals, elevating the status of slaves, lowering the status of citizens.

Without the imposed polarity of Christian belief (good-evil; Jesus-Satan), Saturnalia, I contend, is able to be much more ambivalent, because it can concentrate contradictory binaries, the life and death of carnival, in a single deity. In Christianity, necessarily, the ambivalence of the celebration is to some extent suppressed by the binary opposites of Satan and Jesus (one of whom must actually triumph). The ambivalence is remembered, but perhaps not entirely present. Saturnalia in fact may ultimately work better for Bakhtin's original concept of the grotesque than his own carnival does. Ambivalence for Bakhtin is a moment of transformation, of becoming. It is the positive being born--or erupting--from the negative in a never-ending cycle; the image Bakhtin likes to use is that of "pregnant death" (1968: 25).

In Saturnalia the full ambivalent power of life growing out of death growing out of life cyclically, of laughter defeating monsters but monsters ever-present, is contained in the god Saturn. Versnel (1993: 142-3) points out the many contradictions in the god:

> No god in the Roman pantheon can boast a more paradoxical character: he is simultaneously autochthonous and an immigrant; his has the oldest sanctuary in Rome, yet he is worshipped *ritu Graeco*; he is dangerous and chthonic, a god of the underworld who spends the year in bonds, and he is a god of abundance who presided over a golden age of plenty in Italy.

Thomson (1972: 21) recognizes this tension in his definition of the grotesque and draws a distinction between the grotesque and other "comic" modes: "the unresolved nature of the grotesque conflict is important, and helps to mark off the grotesque from other modes or categories of literary discourse." Thomson is perceiving in "conflict" the ambivalence that is central to Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque, but conflict is perhaps the wrong word. In the grotesque, fear and laughter are not so much in conflict as contained within one body, festival, or god. There is a constant process of inversion (Bakhtin actually uses the image of a clown turning cartwheels at one point). Thomson is correct that there must not be a "resolution" in favor of one side or the other, but I think his description suggests a static rather than dynamic set of images. Bakhtin's idea of "becoming" must be part of the grotesque equation, so in a sense the conflict is resolved (for Bakhtin, in favor of laughter over fear), but with the understanding that all resolutions are temporary and part of the dynamic flow of the ambivalent body or world within which life and death are constantly contained.

Versnel (1993: 144-145) goes on to contrast the benign Saturn of *Aeneid* 8.320-5 with elements of popular worship of Saturn. Saturn “had connections with the underworld” and “it was commonly believed that the planet Saturn exercised harmful influences." The fear inspired by these facets of Saturn is counter-balanced

by the ideas of super-abundance and righteousness, *δικαιότατος* (Plutarch, *Moralia* 266.12), depicted during the *Saturnia Regna*, the Italian Golden Age.

There are two sources for that fear in Bakhtin's theory of carnival, one spiritual and one social, and the holiday responds to both. In its pre-social construct era, the feast developed as a celebration over the negative forces of nature and its chthonic deities capable of withholding food. The feast was a celebration of the harvest defeating the underworld. In the carnival era, that celebration has been Christianized as a triumph over death and Satan, and Bakhtin cites rituals as well as literary and non-literary plays to support this (1968: 3-11). The feast remains, though its response to the fear of chthonic forces is muddied in that its abundance is no longer clearly a triumph over the now completely spiritual chthonic force of Satan. Politically and socially, the fear is present as a fear of the oppression of "official culture," which carnival (for a time) overturns. This fear of official culture and its defeat by and through laughter is what is of particular interest to Bakhtin. That the fear exists on this dual level is important because the different levels are what allow the grotesque to exist as a literary embodiment of carnival spirit, language, and imagery. In Bakhtin, popular-festive imagery and language in literature are a form of resistance against official culture and its oppressive nature in his eyes. For Bakhtin, the grotesque isn't carnival *per se*, but rather a manipulation of carnival, its spirit, language, and imagery, by someone not strictly "of the people," but someone who understands popular imagery and deploys it against official culture for his own intellectual, artistic, and political purposes.

The next component of Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque that I believe may be deployed to understand Neronian satire is the representation of the grotesque body, a body directly opposed to the "classical" body of official culture. Distinct in many ways from carnival, it is another of the most crucial knots of imagery in the grotesque, and ultimately leads to similar themes of inversion, debasement, and rebirth. Bakhtin defines the two poles of the body, the classical and the grotesque, essentially by the terms "completed" and "unfinished" (1968: 25-26). The state of "becoming" can imply a wide range of ideas and can be represented symbolically in many different ways, so the typical "grotesque" figure the word calls to mind is not the only manifestation of a grotesque body. "Unfinished" can be represented by a body in literal transformation, a body midway between one thing and another--a hybrid state such as can be seen in the mythological creatures that are part of the decor of the Domus Aurea, for instance. A subtler manifestation of this principle, though, is a body that is somehow unclosed or irregular, disproportionate. Grotesque bodies are at points bulbous and protruding, at points convex and even porous, the key being some indication of a potential for growth, change, penetrability, fertility, and birth:

> The grotesque body ... is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body ... All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome ... thus the artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths. (1968: 317-318)

The grotesque body manifests itself in literature through its most basic bodily functions: eating, drinking, urinating, defecating, having sex. These functions often take place in grotesque literature, and they are often suggested as well by an exaggeration of the body or its individual parts that relate to these functions (1968: 26). Crucial to the notion of the grotesque body is again the notion of ambivalence. The grotesque walks a line between fear and laughter, death and life. Ultimately, the tension is resolved in favor of laughter and life. At their most grotesque, these bodies are the corpses out of which new life is springing, images of "pregnant death" (1968: 25).

Davis (2006: 4) locates the grotesque body at one end of a spectrum with the ideal (or classical) at the other. In his sliding scale of bodily excellence, the ideal/classical is aristocratic in its origin, born of high culture, whereas the grotesque form lies at the opposite end of the human spectrum and is a "signifier of the people" and of "common life." To make Davis' spectrum more concrete, we might populate it with statues corresponding to his divine ideal (Davis chooses Helen, but we might also add Apollo) at the classical pole, with figures such as the godlike portrait statues of Alexander and Augustus close by. Silenus could be placed at the grotesque end.

Another facet of the body that features prominently in Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque is the "material bodily lower stratum." The idea here is the movement downwards through the body away from the head. The material bodily lower stratum is the stomach, the bowels, and the genitals; the various activities of this stratum are also a part of it, so digestion, sex, defecation and urination are all

associated with this concept. Bakhtin's focus here is as much on the idea of downward movement, ultimately in its sense of moving to the underworld, burial, and renewal, as it is on the organs themselves. Downward movement is death and then life, the same type of ambiguity found in carnival laughter and that the Romans found in the god Saturn and Saturnalia. The material bodily lower stratum includes the genitals and womb--birth happens there. But, symbolically, eating and swallowing are a kind of death and burial. For Bakhtin (1968: 354), "bodily topography of folk humor is closely woven with cosmic topography" and "the lower bodily stratum is not only a bodily grave but also the area of the genital organs, the fertilizing and generating stratum" (1968: 148). So the downward thrust into the material bodily lower stratum, a focus on those organs or on the actions particular to them, is similar in its meaning to the downward, chthonic thrust of folk festivals that confront the fear of death and want. Always this downward thrust is intended to produce laughter and to suggest rebirth.

The third element of Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque to be applied to Neronian era satire is the debasement of official culture through marketplace language and abuse. Like the other two components, the language and imagery can seem quite different, but the symbolic meaning will resonate with the meaning of carnival images and images of the grotesque body: inversion and debasement to ultimately effect rebirth through laughter. Bakhtin (1968: 370-371) says that "debasement is the fundamental artistic principle of grotesque realism; all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of the material bodily stratum or else combined and mixed with its images." Thus, yet another element from the

grotesque's *satura lanx*, debasement and abuse, is in fact participating in that same weaving of cosmic and bodily topography seen in images of the grotesque body and in carnival-Saturnalia. Obscenities and abuse, often referred to in *Rabelais and his World* as "billingsgate," are in their origin based on "literal debasement in terms of the topography of the body" (1968: 148), such as the hurling of excrement (or the milder stand-in of mud-slinging) and drenching in urine. But this type of language is "closely linked with fertility" (1968: 149) as well, so again we find the ambivalence, the life-in-death-in-life, that is characteristic of the grotesque.

Bakhtin's theories about the grotesque are tailored as an explanation primarily for one author's language and imagery: Rabelais. The sources for this system of imagery and language that Bakhtin observes he claims have been consistent and well-understood from antiquity through the Renaissance, but Rabelais' use of that language and imagery is purposeful: "he uses the popular-festive system of images with its charter of freedoms consecrated by many centuries; and he uses them to inflict a severe punishment on his foe, the Gothic age" (1968: 268). This is as close as Bakhtin gets to distinguishing between the spirit of carnival with its popular-festive cluster of images and language and its use (maybe even appropriation) by a member of the intellectual elite to serve his specific, artistic and political ends. Since the objectives Bakhtin imagines for Rabelais' work are in keeping with his basic political and philosophical point about popular imagery, he makes that leap comfortably and without real comment. But popular imagery and language can be appropriated by anyone, and that system of grotesque language and symbolism can be deployed to make different points at different times.

Bakhtin is at pains always to point out that the debasement central to the grotesque cannot be merely negative; it must be ambivalent. The destructive debasement must also be generative, and this ambivalence is present in every aspect of his theory of the grotesque. So when talking about Nero's grotesque aesthetic, we need to look for an adoption or adaptation of popular language and imagery, but we must also look for the ambivalence. What are Nero and the artists of his time debasing, destroying, and what is "becoming" in its place? The grotesque is supposed to destroy official culture and invert it through debasement and laughter. But Nero was princeps, so what "official culture" could he and his like-minded artists be resisting?

The Neronian Grotesque

Modern readers of the satire of Nero's age have relied on a framework for their reading and interpretation that is dependent on a reassertion of Roman satire as "satirizing" in the modern sense, in this case politically and culturally, and on continuing the construction of Nero as depraved, oppressive, and asinine. What if, instead, we begin with a model that takes the good (and even the neutral) that's been said about Nero and his reign as a starting point? Nero was young, artistic, and ambitious for popularity. That's not an overly rosy characterization of the young emperor at the beginning of his reign. As the right-side bookend of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, Nero has often been compared (unfavorably, of course) to his left-side counterpart Augustus. Nero initiated the comparison himself, Suetonius says:

> Atque ut certiorem adhuc indolem ostenderet, ex
> Augusti praescripto imperaturum se professus, neque
> liberalitatis neque clementiae, ne comitatis quidem

> exhibendae ullam occasionem omisit.
>
> *Life of Nero* 10
>
> To show further without a doubt he was the rising hope of the family, he announced he would rule according to Augustus' example and did not miss an opportunity for showing his generosity, clemency, or indeed his good nature.

It is logical that, with Augustus' achievements on his mind from the outset, Nero would extend this comparison to the revivification of the arts under his reign. In our invariably unfavorable comparison of the two, we grant Nero the start to a "Silver Age" of art compared to Augustus' "Golden" one.

With Augustus, a unified artistic vision was possible for Rome for the first time. Previously the competitive agenda of different aristocrats and generals had resulted in a variety of different creative modes, with the result that "the Late Republic has rightly been called the Golden Age of creativity in Roman art" (Zanker, 1988: 335). With power in the hands of one man, a unified look for the regime was possible and desirable, and became the dominant aesthetic for others to imitate:

> The self-aggrandizement of rival generals was replaced by veneration of a ruler chosen by the gods, invidious private ostentation by a program of *publica magnificentia* ... and immorality and neglect of the gods by a religious and spiritual renewal. Such a program required a new visual language ... This includes not only "works of art," buildings, and poetic imagery, but also religious ritual, clothing, state ceremony, the emperor's conduct and forms of social intercourse."
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> (Zanker, 1988: 3)

Zanker does not suggest that the new aesthetic of the Augustan regime was a "master program outlining some propaganda campaign"[29] (1998: 101) but rather a natural spread of ideas, imagery, and style "once the princeps had shown the way and taken the first steps." Nevertheless, Augustus and those working with him had clearly achieved something new in Rome in all of the arts, and it was a lasting achievement that served to define most of the Julio-Claudian principate.

Freudenberg (2001: 127-129; 2005: 13) sees the Neronian age as an attempt at a neo-Augustan posture, poets reviving Augustan forms, imitating Augustan authors.[30] Nero clearly was going back to the Augustan principate on multiple levels as a model for his own, but is "imitation" the correct word? Instead, I propose that Nero, young, rebellious, artistic, and oh so interested in popularity, was likely attempting to emulate Augustus rather than imitate him, to rival him and his achievements (including their originality) without copying. Artistically, this entailed the creation of a unified aesthetic for his principate that finds its expression in public appearance/performance, in the visual arts, and in literature. Nero, unlike his predecessors Tiberius, Gaius (Caligula), and Claudius, wasn't interested in repetition or imitation. As an artist, Nero saw the old Augustan modes of expression as dead, tapped out, and he sought something new instead.[31]

In seeking a new identity for his principate, Nero and his coterie of artists (literary and visual) opted for a very different approach from the Augustan classical

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[29] See also Galinsky (1996: 39-41).
[30] For Neronian "classicism," i.e. hearkening to Augustan forms, see Maes (2008: 315-317).
[31] Maes (2008: 321) sees in Neronian literature not only grotesque elements but a sincere embrace of Augustan classicism.

one, an approach that the Augustan aesthetic had specifically rejected in both the visual and the literary arts. Nero chose popular and festive culture, the grotesque, as the source for the visual, linguistic, and symbolic vocabulary that he would often use to characterize his principate, and it is possible to see this in virtually every mode of public self-representation and artistic expression during Nero's reign.[32] There was a method to his madness. I will argue that the Neronian satirists share this aesthetic as willing participants and architects of this new style, for they are part of the Neronian program, not moralizing against it.

Nero's vocabulary of symbolism and imagery, his mode of self-representation and public performance, came from the popular sources which Bakhtin would subsequently consider the foundation for his theory of the grotesque. To see the kind of clear and consistent choices Nero was making, it is useful to start where the term grotesque actually started: Nero's house and its decorative painting. Bakhtin's own description of these paintings serves as a "full circle" look at how these images inform his conception of the grotesque:

> They impressed the connoisseurs by the extremely fanciful, free, and playful treatment of plant, animal, and human forms. These forms seemed to be interwoven as if giving birth to each other. The borderlines that divide the kingdoms of nature in the usual picture of the world were boldly infringed. Neither was there the usual static presentation of reality. There was no longer the movement of finished forms, vegetable or animal, in a finished and stable world; instead the inner movement of being itself was expressed in the passing of one form into the other, in the ever

[32] Following Zanker and Galinsky's analysis of Augustan culture, I would not go so far as to say this was a unified program of propaganda. Rather, the grotesque was a mode Nero was attracted to because it was popular, and Nero had an interest in popular culture as well as being popular; Nero was also attracted to it because of its clear differences from the Augustan aesthetic that allowed Nero the opportunity to offer something new rather than derivative.

> incomplete character of being. This ornamental interplay revealed an extreme lightness and freedom of artistic fantasy, a gay, almost laughing, libertinage. Bakhtin (1968: 32)

This initial manifestation of grotesque imagery Bakhtin greatly widens to incorporate a wide array of modes of expression and symbols from popular culture, as we have seen. But here, in Nero's palace, is where the term grotesque begins, and it is worth looking at the grotesque initially from the perspective of the visual arts. The grotesque style in painting that inspires and is referred to by Bakhtin is evident in much of the painted decoration of Nero's palace. Imagery, theme, and inspiration often hearken to popular forms of decoration or subject matter.

The room of Achilles at Skyros provides an excellent, more specific, example of the kind of painting Bakhtin is discussing: "the pilasters become plant stalks, and inside the shell-like basin there are vine tendrils full of birds, winged busts, lyres, at the side of which miniscule animals are arranged ..."[33] (Figure 2). This fluid dynamism, this juxtaposition of surprising and unexpected elements, is characteristic of the ornamentation of the Domus Aurea, and it is the inspiration for Bakhtin's theme of "becoming" in the grotesque: the grotesque, according to Bakhtin, paints a world in constant transition and rebirth, never static or "complete." I suggest that the Neronian grotesque embraces this type of popular imagery, replete with images of "becoming," as symbolic of a new, reborn principate and, in the case or our satirists, a new and reborn literary style.

Augustus could not be equaled by imitation, and the standardization of imagery under Augustus (Zanker, 1998: 335) led to something of a static,

[33] Sciortino (1999: 86).

unchanging system of images (Zanker, 1998: 338). Under his successors, imitations of Augustus' principate resulted in what might be termed in the grotesque as senility and decay in art and literature, and at times in political terror as well. Both conditions are represented in early Neronian literature by the figure of Claudius and the condition of literature under his reign. In the arts, the Claudian imitations have resulted in enervated, overly refined verse lacking vitality and originality, as all three Roman satirists mention at various points. By adopting an entirely new, popular approach, Nero can promise renewal and rebirth of the principate, of literature, and of the visual arts. That this mode of expression, the popular forms that inform and inspire the grotesque, was deemed antithetical to the official culture of the Julio-Claudian dynasty (up to the time of Nero) and its mode of self-representation is clear from Augustan-era writings on this very subject. Remaining strictly with the visual for the time being, Vitruvius provides the "party line" for the Julio-Claudians on grotesque wall painting:

> [1] ... Namque pictura imago fit eius, quod est seu potest esse, uti homines, aedificia, naves, reliquarumque rerum, e quibus finitis certisque corporibus figurata similitudine sumuntur exempla. Ex eo antiqui, qui initia expolitionibus instituerunt, imitati sunt primum crustarum marmorearum varietates et conlocationes ...
>
> [3] ... Sed haec, quae ex veris rebus exempla sumebantur, nunc iniquis moribus inprobantur. <Nam pinguntur> tectoriis monstra potius quam ex rebus finitis imagines certae: pro columnis enim struuntur calami striati, pro fastigiis appagineculi cum crispis foliis et volutis, item candelabra aedicularum sustinentia figuras, supra fastigia eorum surgentes ex radicibus cum volutis teneri plures habentes in se sine ratione sedentia sigilla, non minus coliculi dimidiata habentes sigilla alia humanis alia bestiarum capitibus.
>
> [4] Haec autem nec sunt nec fieri possunt nec fuerunt ... Ergo ita novi mores coegerunt, uti inertiae mali iudices convincerent

> artium virtutes: Iudiciis autem infirmis obscuratae mentes non valent probare, quod potest esse cum auctoritate et ratione decoris. Neque enim picturae probari debent, quae non sunt similes veritati ... (*De Architectura* 7.5)

> 1. ... For painting makes an image of what is or is possible, such as men, buildings, boats, other subjects from whose definite and delimited bodies images fashioned in their likeness are taken. According to this people in the past, who started using polished finishes, imitated the varieties and arrangements of marble surfaces ...
>
> 3. ... But these images which used to be taken from reality now are not valued in the same way. For monstrosities are painted on walls rather than definite images from delimited things: indeed, instead of columns wrinkly reeds are set up, instead of gables little decorative fixtures with curling leaves and volutes, candelabras, furthermore, supporting images of buildings, and from their roofs rising out of roots with volutes, delicate flowers holding seated figures without any sense, and just as many stalks with figures growing out of them, some with human heads, some animal.
>
> 4. However these things don't, didn't, and can't exist...Therefore the new style has been so dominant that bad judges in ignorance refute the virtues of the arts: moreover minds benighted by unsound judgments are not capable of valuing what can exist according to the authority and rationality of decorum. In fact, pictures shouldn't be valued which are not like reality …

The description of popular wall painting here, of course, is in accord with much of the decorative program we have seen above from the Domus Aurea. It is worth noting as well that the kind of painting of which Vitruvius approves in the first paragraph, the realistic polychrome paintings of marble slabs, is exactly the kind of painting to be seen in the (public, at least) rooms of the house of Augustus: "the large expanses of monochrome wall on which our eye comes to rest represent a major innovation. The striving for intelligibility, the clear delineation of socle, wall, ornament, and picture field, and a uniform, quiet color scheme in the individual

rooms betokens a new longing for calm, order, clarity" (Zanker, 1998: 283). Vitruvius' artistic principles are naturally in keeping with those of the regime. Vitruvius' phrase *obscuratae mentes* suggests that he and perhaps the dedicatee of his work as well, Augustus, see this kind of very popular art as "low" culture.[34]

Nero's choice of these popular forms is not just the "bad taste" implied by Vitruvius; in addition to these forms clearly being the popular choice and signifying Nero as artistically in tune with popular art forms, they put Nero's aesthetic choices in dialogue with those of Augustus himself. Nero is rejecting Augustan principles of decoration (and decorum) in favor of an aesthetic that Vitruvius suggests is in diametrical opposition. This is something that will be seen consistently in a variety of modes of artistic expression and self-representation undertaken by Nero and the members of his court, including the writers of satire. Nero is revolutionizing the arts, creating an artistic program that supports his self-representation, just as Augustus and his regime did. In emulating Augustus, he confronts his predecessor head-on and offers up, not new forms, but forms made new in the context of their participation in imperial culture.

Bakhtin posits as polar opposites the "classical" and the grotesque. In the classical aesthetic, "the body was first of all a strictly completed, finished product. Furthermore, it was isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies. All signs of its unfinished character, of its growth and proliferation were eliminated ... the ever unfinished nature of the body was hidden, kept secret" (1968: 29). Vitruvius' word

[34] Of course, part of the Augustan regime's impact on the arts was that others followed suit and Augustan trends were imitated; in a sense, they became popular in a different way. For the spread of the Augustan decorative system see Zanker (1998: 283-285).

choice in describing the "correct" form of painting is telling in this context: *finitus* and *certus* embody the ideals of the classical aesthetic as described by Bakhtin: completion, closure. The Augustan aesthetic may certainly be read as the classical aesthetic. Nero has chosen the opposite pole on which to visually and verbally depict his reign and, in doing so, indulges in a rebellious counter-cultural repudiation of what had, for over half a century, served as "official culture." In doing this, in starting fresh and espousing a new set of artistic principles that will extend to the visual arts, literature, and Nero's own self-representation, he is ultimately attempting to mirror the achievement of Augustus, the original architect of official, imperial culture. After all, Augustus started as a revolutionary too.

Neronian culture makes use of the kinds of grotesque bodies described by Bakhtin and Davis. Already mentioned are those used in the painted decoration of the Domus Aurea (and the popularity of that style, described by Vitruvius, supports the idea that this style was "common"). More surprising, though, than the use of the grotesque body in Neronian painting--a use that essentially is consistent from the time of Augustus but for its shift from common-private space to official-public space--is the subtle use of these grotesque principles in Neronian portraiture. The emperor routinely has himself represented as a grotesque figure, breaking from generations of imperial iconography in portrait sculpture.

As part of his new visual vocabulary, Augustus had revolutionized portraiture. Both Zanker (1998: 98-99) and Galinsky (1996: 165) feel that Augustus himself played a role in creating the portrait, which differed dramatically from

earlier Roman portrait style.[35] Zanker (1998: 99) describes this portrait as "a completely intellectual and artificial work of art, composed of Classical forms subtly mixed with just a few authentic physiognomic traits." The clear comparison to be made (both Zanker and Galinsky do so) is with the classical Doryphorus of Polyclitus (Figure 3). In its embrace of symmetry and its "harmonious proportions," the Doryphorus is the "embodiment of perfection and nobility" (Zanker, 1998: 98-99). Galinsky (1996: 174) notes in particular the qualities of the hair (again modeled on the Doryphorus): "The hair of both is ordered carefully in the manner of movement and countermovement, a resolution of opposites that is at the heart of the classical aesthetic. Symmetry is suggested by the parted, forklike locks in the center of the forehead." But the portrait is more than just beautiful in the classical sense. Both Zanker and Galinsky note the portrait's ability to convey *auctoritas*, and Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria* 5.12.20) likens the Doryphorus itself to the eloquence of a man *gravis et sanctus* (dignified and holy). Zanker (1998: 100) sums up: "we are dealing here with a ruler portrait, but of a novel type, whose language only the more cultivated would have grasped. But even the ordinary citizen would have inferred such concepts as beautiful, ageless, thoughtful, and remote." This portrait type is essentially the embodiment of Bakhtin's description of the "classical" body that he sets in direct contrast with the grotesque. Resonating with Bakhtin's "strictly completed, finished product" we have the "perfection" of the Augustus portrait (and its model, the Doryphorus); where Bakhtin says that, in the classical

[35] Galinsky and Zanker both point out that there was more than one portrait type of Augustus, though the differences are not significant and there is clearly a "main" portrait type that was by far the most common.

body, "all signs of its unfinished character, of its growth and proliferation were eliminated," we have the "ageless 'classical' beauty" (Zanker 1998: 99) of the Augustan portrait "although this was the 'official' portrait until Augustus' death at the age of seventy-five" (Galinsky, 1996: 173); with the idea that the classical body is "isolated" and "fenced off from all other bodies" we have the word "remote" applied to the Augustan portrait.

As for Augustus, there were several different portrait types for Nero, and several of these are unlike any Julio-Claudian portraits yet seen. It is typical to assume that the portraits of Nero that radically depart from the Augustan type (followed more or less faithfully by the rest of the Julio-Claudians) do so realistically. Poulsen (1962: 34) opines:

> Il nous paraît cependant curieux qu'un art officiel de cour ait été autorisé à rendre de cette manière l'image d'un souverain en déchéance, mais nous rencontrons ici justement une des particularités d'un caractère comme celui de Néron: la force de la vanité qui peut rendre digne d'admiration et séduisante la plus repoussante image reflétée par le miroir.

Clearly Poulsen is being guided by a reading of Tacitus and Suetonius, completely embracing the traditional construct of Nero: the portrait tells a story of moral and physical decline (1962: 35-36) that Nero himself, through a combination of vanity and insanity, cannot read properly.

Often, this break with traditional Julio-Claudian portraiture is written off as idiosyncrasy or realism. Griffin (1984: 121), in her more balanced picture of Nero, eliminates the moral reading of the portrait, but still argues that "the increasingly bloated look of Nero's face and neck, in combination with facial detail and

expressions familiar from the earlier portraits, argue for realistic portrayal."[36] Hiesinger (1975: 123) sees in Neronian portraiture "a self-contained development, based on a style of dramatically heightened realism." However, it is erroneous to assume that these portraits are any more realistic than those of Augustus. We have no reliable description of Nero: Bradley (1978: 18) cautions that Suetonius' description of the emperor (*Life of Nero,* 51) may have actually been influenced by the portraits, and Suetonius is also known to seek confirmation of his character assessments in the physical traits he presents: "Suetonius in particular uses physical disgust at Nero's body as a way of heightening his moral disgust" (Skotheim, 2017: 272). As indicated, it's possible that Neronian portraiture actually shapes the Suetonian description,[37] playing into the biographer's hands in its deviation from "the ideal" of official culture; Nero's appearance, from the traditional, classical point of view, is grotesque, but not in Bakhtin's sense.

When Poulsen (1962: 36) says "loin de nous montrer le reflet de la divinité, nous font voir le profond abîme de l'esprit humain," there is an echo of Kayser's description of the grotesque and his only-dark, fearful interpretation of that imagery. The assumption that Neronian portraits are realistic is based on the fact that several types prominently display what I suggest are grotesque features. Most obviously, the emperor frequently is clearly portrayed as fat. Not only do the contours of the face and chin suggest the bulbous convexities of the grotesque body, but they also suggest the kind of feasting and abundance that is part of the overall

[36] Griffin is discussing numismatic portraits.
[37] Bradley (1978: 18).

festive mood of many incarnations of the grotesque *and* part of a consistent Neronian program of public appearance as well.

Nero's nose, too, is bulbous, unlike any other Julio-Claudian nose. In grotesque imagery, the nose "always symbolizes the phallus" (Bakhtin, 1968: 316) and further, in popular superstitions in medicine, the size of the nose directly correlates to the size and potency of the phallus. Neronian portraits may not be going quite so far, but they exhibit the traits of grotesque figures in many ways and are clearly intended to be antithetical to the Julio-Claudian portraits of the previous emperors. The hair and the beard, too, break with Julio-Claudian iconography, resembling satyrs—hybrid, festive, grotesque creatures—more than the idealized deities the other emperors are modeled on. The curving whorls of Nero's hair are also reminiscent of the vegetable decoration used in the grotesque painting of the Domus Aurea, and the actual hairstyle itself suggests the hairstyle typically worn by charioteers, idols of popular culture (Figure 4).[38] On the sculptural spectrum, Nero is portraying himself with these portraits much more closely to Silenus, the grotesque, the popular, rather than the classical-ideal side where we would locate a deity like Apollo—or Augustus.[39]

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[38] Griffin (1984: 121). This interpretation seems to have originated with Toynbee (1947). Bergmann (2013: 338) does not subscribe to this reading, arguing that both Nero and charioteers were simply wearing the same fashionable do. Whether Nero is directly aping charioteers or not, the choice of the hairstyle seems to still indicate Nero portraying himself as in line with pop rather than traditional culture.

[39] I suggest that the contrast between Neronian and traditional Julio-Claudian portraiture is part of the overall Neronian program. Hiesinger is right that the imagery is a "self-contained development," but not necessarily right in focusing on realism. Bergmann (2013) has suggested that the portraiture is representative of Nero's interest in legitimizing a life of *otium*. The reading is problematic though in that it is only a slightly more neutral version of the realism-moral degradation

Augustus, decades earlier, broke with "traditional" portraiture by adopting the "ideal," as defined by Classical art, as the visual style for his portrait and, metaphorically, for his regime. Traditional republican portraiture exists over a broad range of the sculptural spectrum in that it portrayed men everywhere in between the ideal (gods) and the grotesque (satyrs). Identification with Apollo and other deities was part of the Augustan aesthetic principle and, at the time, it was a revolutionary idea in Roman art. In seizing the opposite end of the sculptural spectrum, Nero, at least with this particular portrait type, makes several statements at once about his regime. First, the popular nature of the portrait is suggestive of Nero's desire for appeal with the people—the positive nature of the portrait would have been understood in the context of popular visual culture. It is also possibly indicative of a message to the aristocracy of the changing values and of a weakening of their status with the Neronian world. Most clearly, though, it is an artistic statement being made by an artist who ruled the world. The visual vocabulary of the Julio-Claudian dynasty was played out, and here was something new from the young artist-emperor. Revolution, rebirth, renovation are all freight being carried in the visual cues of this portrait. These weren't messages that played well with the more traditionally-minded aristocracy and with the official culture that succeeded Nero, so their message and meaning was lost, ignored, suppressed in favor of a slide up the sculptural scale during the Flavian dynasty and a reading of grotesque traits from the perspective of elite, traditional culture. That reading revalued those

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interpretation. This reading also doesn't really account for the artistically rebellious nature of this break with tradition.

physical traits according to its own aesthetic and then used them to support a moral condemnation of character.

Like the Neronian portrait type, the Domus Aurea itself is, in many ways, a three-dimensional representation of the grotesque principles seen in its painted décor. It is a three dimensional, spatial enactment of the grotesque principle of "becoming." The vaults and domes of the public spaces of the Domus Aurea, forms consciously used for the purpose of a unified and consistent aesthetic for the first time in official Roman architecture (MacDonald, 1965: 14), are the convexities and concavities of the principles of the grotesque body, the architectural complement to those of the Neronian portrait. In the play of rooms in the octagonal hall, for example, we can specifically see principles of the grotesque played out spatially for the first time. Unlike static or "closed" spaces typically produced through right angles and straight lines, the rooms of the octagonal hall complex do not end—they are never "complete."[40] Instead, aided by the play of light from above and from room to room, each room flows into the next in a seemingly unbroken flow of movement through space. One room, in effect, "becomes" the next in a constant sense of dynamic growth and movement, just as the decorative painting of the Domus Aurea presents such themes through its use of vegetation-turned-

[40] The octagonal room has often been identified with the dining room described by Suetonius (*Life of Nero,* 31) that included some sort of rotating representation of the heavens. The tradition begs acknowledgement of this unusual decoration and its place in the symbolism of the grotesque. A depiction of the cosmos within this space, and one in dynamic motion and change, furthermore, is a powerful message within the context of grotesque imagery—particularly in a room for feasting—versus the Augustan principles of static eternity. The Neronian aesthetic embraces change and novelty.

architecture-turned-animal and its hybrid creatures. A contrast with Augustan principles is again useful: Zanker (1998: 280) in his description of Augustan style painting observes that "the illusion of breaking through the wall is no longer sought--rather its integrity is emphasized." The Augustan aesthetic prefers the closed, the delineated, whereas the Neronian prefers dynamic, changing fluidity. The play of light along the curved surfaces of the Domus Aurea serves to further enhance this principle because of the dynamic, changing nature of the appearances of these spaces as the natural light changes throughout the day.

Vitruvius' reaction to the grotesque style of the type of painting later found in the Domus Aurea has already been discussed, and, I suggest, the pictorial decoration of the Domus Aurea is part of a Neronian program that engages directly with classicism and Augustanism[41] on every artistic level. Just how far the architecture of the Domus Aurea might be from classical aesthetic principles may be ascertained from a famous (admittedly later) clash between the two principles embodied by Trajan's architect, Apollodorus, and the future emperor Hadrian in Dio 69.4. Hadrian's use of domes in particular comes under fire in the eyes of the architect who brought Rome the straight lines and right angles of the Forum of Trajan: "ἄπελθε καὶ τὰς κολοκύντας γράφε" (get out of here and go draw your pumpkins). Curvature and convexity are provocative to the admirer of the straight line. Hadrian's "pumpkins" then are part of an architectural stylistic continuation begun by Nero and his architects: an architectural *apocolocyntosis* of the city itself!

[41] See MacDonald (1982: 10) for the consciously conservative choices of the Augustan regime and their echo in Vitruvius.

So the grotesque body has its place in the Neronian aesthetic in many different ways. It is evident in the Domus Aurea both in pictorial representation of those bodies and, theoretically, in the décor and the architecture itself of the complex. It is evident as well in the emperor's self-representation through his portrait sculpture in which he resembles a fat Silenus more than an Apollonian god.

Like Augustus, Nero extended his aesthetic ideas into the realm of public persona as well. Again, one can see Nero consciously taking the opposite pole to the one Augustus had chosen. A large part of Augustus' public persona was modeled on *virtus*[42] and traditional values: "Augustus offered himself as the greatest *exemplum* and tried in his private life and public appearance to be a constant advertisement for the *mores maiorum*" (Zanker, 1998: 159). Here, I choose two examples of how Augustus' concept of *virtus* and the *mores maiorum* were played out in public, one very personal, the other impacting the populace; both of these examples will contrast nicely with Neronian practice.

The first is Augustus' emphasis on the toga: "Augustus succeeded in making the toga a kind of unofficial state dress and a symbol of the proper attitude" (Zanker, 1998: 162). Suetonius (*Life of the Deified Augustus,* 40) tells us this was more than just modeling proper behavior; Augustus insisted:

> Etiam habitum vestitumque pristinum reducere studuit, ac visa quondam pro contione pullatorum turba indignabundus et clamitans: "en Romanos, rerum dominos gentemque togatam!" negotium aedilibus dedit, ne quem posthac paterentur in Foro circave nisi positis lacernis togatum consistere.

[42] For a full discussion, see Galinsky (1996: 80-140).

> Even when it came to style and fashion he was eager to bring back the old ways, and once when he saw a crowd of men in black at a public assembly he was highly indignant and kept shouting: "Behold the Romans, masters of the world and the people of the toga!" After that he assigned aediles to allow no one to be in the Forum or anywhere around it unless he had removed his cloak and was wearing a toga.

Here we have personal dress, public persona, and the Augustan literary program all encapsulated in one public moment. Augustus' modeling of old-fashioned fashion was something he had had celebrated in poetry (he is quoting Vergil above), and it was something he tried to make obligatory in the practice of the rest of the citizens.

Part of the importance of the toga was that it was a "national" garment and set Romans apart from other (subject) peoples. Separation and stratification played an important role in Augustus' Rome within the citizen body as well, as we know from his rules about seating in places like the theater. Segregation and stratification in seating in the theater was not new, but Augustus saw it as important and took it to the next level with his *lex Iulia theatralis*, which "designated all the rows and seats, giving preferential seating to some and discriminating against others" (Zanker, 1998: 149). Segregation occurred based on rank (senators had the orchestra), gender, free status, military service, age, tribe, and magistracies. The sheer specificity of so many categories emphasizes the importance Augustus placed on knowing one's place in a public setting and being able to see that stratification.

I would suggest that Nero consciously adopted on multiple occasions a very different approach to his interactions with the people, and that this can be seen both in his clothing and in his public appearances. Rather than the *mores maiorum* as his model for these interactions, the guiding image was that of Saturnalia, thus situating

this mode of self-representation within the Neronian grotesque as well, just as Augustus' public persona was complemented by his own artistic program.

Mythologically, the reign of Saturn knew no social strata, and it is possible that Nero, in his reimagining of the Augustan *Saturnia regna* as a sort of *Saturnalia regna*, had this in mind as part of his appeal to the populace and his rejection of the patrician class. Part of Augustus' wide-reaching program of dynastic imagery and self-representation was the idea that his rule was in some ways a return to the golden age of the rule of Saturn in Italy.[43] Again Nero, unlike many before and after him, was not interested so much in aping the Augustan model. He was independent, visionary, and had an agenda all his own that was in many ways different from his dynastic founder and great-great-grandfather's. Nero's self-equation with Augustus was in some ways accomplished through imagery of a return to a golden age, the age of Saturn. Nero's innovation and renovation of that imagery was rooted in making the reign of Saturn Saturnalian.

Bakhtin (1968: 25), describing the development of carnival practice into a vocabulary of literary and visual imagery, asserts that "the sense of time and of change was broadened and deepened, drawing into its cycle social and historic phenomena. The cyclical character is superseded by the sense of historic time. The grotesque images with their relation to changing time and their ambivalence become the means for the artistic and ideological expression of a mighty awareness of history and historic change." For Bakhtin this is a moment of revolution, intellectual if not political. Rabelais' moment of great historic change is the release

[43] See Vergil *Georgics* II. 532-540; *Aeneid* VIII. 314-325. For discussion, see Versnel (1993: 150-152, 192-196 and Galinsky (1996: 93-100).

of the intellect from the fear and oppression of the official culture of the church and the Gothic age. For Bakhtin, the use of the grotesque is inherently an act of revolution. Nero wanted a cultural, artistic, and social revolution, and he chose Saturnalia as a vehicle to express that both artistically and publicly.

Nero's interest in Saturnalia as an image for his reign is evident. A few months after the inauguration of his reign in 54, Nero served as *Satunalius rex* for the celebration of the holiday among his circle. It is possible, some contend likely, that the *Apocolocyntosis* was actually written for this occasion.[44] But Nero's behavior throughout his reign echoes many of Saturnalia's trappings and much of its spirit, and it's worth thinking of Saturnalia as at least in part a signpost to understanding his reign.

According to Suetonius (writing in disapproving tones, of course), Nero would in the early years of his reign at least, don the *pileus* when he was out raising hell with his friends (*Life of Nero,* 26). He also would often appear in Saturnalian garb, the *synthesis*,[45] in public, as Suetonius illustrates in his description of how careless Nero was of his appearance:

> circa cultum habitumque adeo pudendus, ut comam semper in gradus formatam peregrinatione Achaica etiam pone verticem summiserit ac plerumque synthesinam indutus ligato circum collum sudario prodierit in publicum sine cinctu et discalciatus.
>
> About his appearance and dress he was so shameless that he grew his hair long in the back on his Greek excursion (it was always arranged in layers) and he often went out in public wearing a Saturnalian robe

[44] This theory will be explored in full in the next chapter.
[45] See Nilsson (1921: 203).

> with a kerchief tied round his neck, no shoes and no belt.

In neither case does Suetonius make a Saturnalian connection, but it is again worth keeping in mind just how visual a culture the Romans had and how sensitive they were to dress. Suetonius may paint these scenes as slumming it or as carelessness, but the fact that both of these garments are part of the traditional dress for the celebration of Saturnalia should be considered. When taken in the larger context of Nero's performative behavior in public, the imagery in both his literary and decorative arts, and his populist statements, the choice of attire takes on greater significance and certainly stands up to a reading as designed to evoke Saturnalia.

In fact, many of Nero's *scelera* related by Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio actually fit into a sort of Saturnalian revelry, performed for the first time on an imperial scale. Nero's wedding to Sporus, for instance, painted vividly by Suetonius, can be interpreted as a sort of Saturnalian burlesque, an off-color joke. Champlin (2003: 149-150) notes two aspects of this incident that mark it as Saturnalian pageantry. First, Nero parades his new bride through the Sigillaria. As the market place named for the traditional Saturnalian gift, this seems a significant choice and one perhaps designed to specifically mark the entire incident as a festive, farcical performance. Champlin also notes that Dio (62. 3) says Nero "Σπόρον ὠνόμαζεν" (called him Sporus), meaning that Sporus was not his real name and that that suggests the name given to him by Nero was all part of an off-color Saturnalian joke: *σπόρος* in Greek means "seed," an ironic name for a boy (supposedly) recently castrated and acting as Nero's wife. Champlin takes the details of this entire incident as fact, though it is

not difficult to see how such a Saturnalian farce would provide ample opportunity for embellishment to Nero's later detractors.

It is at least quite possible that this was pure, farcical performance put on in the spirit of Saturnalia. Surely the medical condition of Sporus would be unknown to most as he was paraded through the Sigillaria. Though Suetonius and others focus on this incident as one of Nero's sexual aberrations, if the incident is viewed through the lens of Saturnalia--and Nero is giving his audience the cue to do just that by choosing the Sigillaria as his public venue--it stands out as a wild, marketplace flouting of social convention. The "marriage" to Sporus reads as an off-color street performance that plays topsy-turvy with "official culture" and laughs at it all. Nero simultaneously makes the joke and is its principle butt, exemplifying the kind of all-inclusive, universal laughter that Bakhtin stresses is key to carnival laughter and, consequently, to the grotesque. Suetonius, the voice of "official culture" writing many years later, either doesn't get the joke or is disinclined to portray it for what it really is.

Another of Nero's festive performances is the feast described by Tacitus (*Annals*, XV. 37). Significantly, Tacitus says of his showpiece that it is not unique: "ut exemplum referam, ne saepius eadem prodigentia narranda sit" (I'll report it as the model, so that the same excesses don't have to be narrated over and over). It's possible to read this disclaimer as a bit of rhetoric: the feast didn't happen regularly and Tacitus would not be able to produce believable multiple accounts, so he has his cake and eats it too. But it's also possible to take his statement literally but without the layer of moralizing, in which case the feast becomes a kind of running show for

the people of Rome with repeat performances.[46] Allen (1962: 100-101) makes the case that Nero is in fact here staging an elaborate celebration of a public festival, rather than simply indulging in debauchery:

> Nero, inclining towards the esthetic potentialities of traditional festivals, seems to have adjusted the manner and rites of celebrations to his own preference and to that of Tigellinus and Petronius. Thus it may be that Tacitus is really reporting the emperor's personal interpretation of some public festival, possibly the Floralia ... The Floralia were particularly noted for the laxity which accompanied them, and Roman courtesans observed this as their special feast-day. The games (ludi) included theatrical exhibitions, all continued at night by torchlight. During this celebration animals were loosed in the Circus Maximus, and we are told that actresses (mimae) were accustomed to strip themselves and to indulge in highly improper gestures.

Nero's feast has many aspects of a Saturnalian-carnivalesque celebration such as this one, produced on an unprecedented scale with the resources of the principate at the *Saturnalius rex's* disposal. Morality is slackened,[47] which is Tacitus' primary point and emphasis, but that is only a part of the carnivalesque fun. It is worth noting, as Champlin (2003: 155-156) does, the theatrical nature of much of this feast: "everyone is acting on a large public stage." The venue must first be considered: the lake of Agrippa was part of a park on the Campus Martius developed by Nero's great grandfather and expanded upon by Nero himself, who had added a bath complex. It was a place for the entertainment and enjoyment of the common

[46] Champlin (2003: 155) notes similarities between Tigellinus' party here in 64 and an earlier one in 59 after Nero's Juvenalia. See Dio 62.20.5.
[47] For this as a feature of Saturnalia, see Bourboulis (1964: 9).

people.[48] Tacitus states that exotic animals[49] from all over the world were a part of the festivities as well, but they seem to have been released throughout the park; there is an element of arena-style entertainment here, but no arena, no separate space for the show. It is worthwhile in light of this description to look at a description of Bakhtin's carnival, in which he specifically invokes Saturnalia, for a comparison:

> In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants. It was most clearly expressed and experienced in the Roman Saturnalias, perceived as a true and full, though temporary, return of Saturn's golden age upon earth.
>
> (1968: 7-8)

So too, the matrons acting as barmaids take on a different aspect if this is all, in fact, a Saturnalian-style performance put on among and with the populace. The noblewomen serving as barmaids and prostitutes are a typical, if racy, instance of

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[48] For Agrippa's Campus Martius projects as a "Villa for the Masses" see Zanker (1998: 141); it is worth remembering this in the context of the discussion of Nero's Domus Aurea as a parallel to this as well--another opportunity to break social barriers and feast the city.

[49] "Volucris et feras diversis e terris et animalia maris Oceano abusque petiverat" (He had sought out birds and beasts from various lands and marine creatures all the way from the farthest seas.)

the kind of social leveling and of the debasing that is part of carnival-type festivals. They become another piece of off-color sexual pageantry like the wedding to Sporus. Tacitus emphasizes the collapse of morality, indeed implies that it is to some extent the cause (or at least the omen) of the great fire of 64 with the next chapter beginning "sequitur clades" (disaster ensues). But if the feast is seen as a Saturnalian-carnivalesque style piece of showmanship, the morality is less important than the theatricality. What's happening isn't real, but rather an inversion of societal norms performed in high spirits and which no one is to take any more literally than the performances of *mimae* during the Floralia or a small-scale Saturnalian dinner where a master might serve his slave.

Tacitus, in his vivid picture, states that on one side of the lake were noblewomen acting as barmaids and prostitutes, while on the other side of the lake the real thing were present. The arrangement is interesting and very much in the tradition of Saturnalia. Classes are leveled; instead of the traditional cap of liberty the players assume more sexual roles, but this is a performance. Matrons and prostitutes perform the same activity (or at least suggest that they do) and are to some degree indistinguishable. Dio adds further incidents of leveling, inversion, and debasement with nobles, gladiators, and slaves all intermingled and performing together.

However, there is an interesting difference between the two accounts that bears marking: Tacitus' entire description of the event is depicted as a *performance* of license; nothing, so far as can be said with certainty, actually happens, and Tacitus gives us only the weakly (if at all) suggestive: "Iam gestus motusque obsceni; et

postquam tenebrae incedebant, quantum iuxta nemoris et circumiecta tecta consonare cantu et luminibus clarescere" (Now there were lewd gestures and dancing; and after darkness fell, the whole of the grove nearby and the shelters placed around it rang with song and glowed with lights). There could be something truly immoral going on, but the naughty gestures, the dancing, the singing into the night, all of that could just as well be part of the license of a Saturnalian style party.[50] Dio's account (62b. 15.5-6), more removed from the event, adds much racier "close-ups" that are easier to dismiss as embellishments added once the original meaning of the pageant had been obscured by time and Nero's detractors: "καί τις καὶ δοῦλος τῇ δεσποίνῃ παρόντος τοῦ δεσπότου καὶ μονομάχος εύγενεῖ κόρῃ ὀρῶντος τοῦ πατρὸς συνεγίνοντο" (and even a slave with his master right there had sex with his mistress, and a gladiator too with an aristocratic girl while her father was watching). In Tacitus, our long-shot paints matrons and prostitutes as performing identically, socially leveled, participating in a carnival show without footlights. There is even a little bit of enforced separation just so things don't get too out of hand: Tacitus states that there is a lake separating the matrons performing as prostitutes from the real thing. Like the Saturnalian feast where strata are visually leveled but everyone knows who's who, Nero's grand sexual farce gets topsy-turvy with the matrons of Rome without actually compromising the social order. The matrons are never tainted by actual contact with the prostitutes they are imitating.

Certainly Nero enjoyed the attention and admiration of the common people and pursued this: "by freeing Saturnalian behavior from its seasonal confines, by

[50] See also Champlin (2003: 153-160) for the feast as Saturnalian and populist in its desire to bring Baiae to the people of Rome.

redefining it, by introducing it deliberately into other parts of Roman life, Nero not only amused himself, he drew emperor and people, ruler and ruled, closer together. Saturnalian behavior made him popular" (Champlin, 2003: 151). But Nero's Saturnalian behavior has more to it than that.

Nero's Saturnalian behavior is part of a large program of self-definition and self-promotion embracing all of the popular elements that Bakhtin would label grotesque. Nero can have his cake (lots of cake) and eat it too: by creating a unified visual and public culture for his reign, Nero is recreating the achievement of the reign of Augustus some sixty years earlier. But Nero, young, creative, rebellious, wasn't interested in imitation--that is the petrified literary and imperial culture of his predecessors against which he is interested in rebelling. Instead, Nero is emulating Augustus through his own plan of self-representation, one that does what the Augustan model did, constantly engages with it, but also challenges and subverts it. That subversion and reinvention consistently embraces (or appropriates) popular culture (as opposed to "high" classical culture) as its mode of expression, allowing Nero and his artists to explore entirely new modes of self-representation. If carnival, in the form of Saturnalia is, as Bakhtin states, "a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal," then Nero and his artists are engaging principally in an artistic rebirth, with the crowd-pleasing implication of a political one as well. Nero is reinventing (the look of) the principate and engaging with "the people" to do so.

Just how populist a reign Nero may have intended is certainly up for debate and beyond the scope of this paper. It is possible that Nero only chose populist

modes of expression and representation as a fresh antithesis to the Julio-Claudian mode that had been created under Augustus and refined and reiterated by his successors up until Nero's reign. His populist approach to self-representation could have been purely artistic and performative, popular rather than populist, with no real political teeth at all. It's also possible that Nero was concentrating his efforts to win support from the people as the base for his power and that his populist imagery was simultaneously an appeal to the people for popularity and a message to the aristocracy that times were changing even if a genuine revolution was not at hand. Suetonius tells us that he had something even more radical in mind:

> multasque nec dubias significationes saepe iecit, ne reliquis quidem se parsurum senatoribus, eumque ordinem sublaturum quandoque e re publica ac provincias et exercitus equiti Romano ac libertis permissurum. Certe neque adveniens neque proficiscens quemquam osculo impertiit ac ne resalutatione quidem; et in auspicando opere Isthmi magna frequentia clare, ut sibi ac populo Romano bene res verteret, optavit dissimulata senatus mentione. (*Life of Nero* 37).
>
> He often tossed out many not so subtle hints that he would in fact not spare the remaining senators and that he would wipe out this order someday from the state and entrust the provinces and armies to the Roman equestrian order and to freedmen. Certainly he didn't give any [senator] a kiss or even a "back atcha" to their greeting when he arrived or departed; and on inaugurating the work at Isthmus with a big crowd in attendance he said he hoped that it would turn out well for himself and the people of Rome and ignored mention of the senate.

Regardless of his political intentions, Nero chose to court popular favor, clearly, and did so through popular avenues that the aristocracy deemed unseemly: one of those modes was Saturnalian, carnivalesque, popular festive behavior. It is somewhat surprising that this mode of public self-representation has not been linked

specifically with Nero's artistic self-expression and with the artistic expression of the artists working for (or at least close to) Nero. When seen through Bakhtin's lens of the grotesque, Nero's "bizarre" behavior becomes bazaar behavior--the behavior of the marketplace--a consistent series of choices of self-expression that enact popular festive modes of expression and appropriate their vocabulary, verbal, visual, and performative, to promote a principate.

But the Neronian program was not limited to the visual arts nor to the emperor's personal image in public, and I would suggest that the principles of the Neronian grotesque are, in multiple ways, played out in Neronian literature—particularly satire—as well. Just as Nero's artistic, sculptural, and architectural choices depart from the Julio-Claudian style established by Augustus and artists and thinkers close to him, so too do those of the literature produced by those with connections to his court. Like the Neronian grotesque aesthetic established with the visual arts, the literature produced under Nero shares certain traits and directly engages with Augustan models. Satire, as a "low" genre, is the grand opening of the Neronian grotesque literary program, and Nero's circle will return to satire early and often. It is the ideal vehicle for the Neronian grotesque.

Satire as a Great Big *Satura Lanx*

Satire is the ideal medium for the launch and the expression of Nero's grotesque enterprise, because it is already loaded with associations appropriate to the Neronian conception of the grotesque: satire is, from its earliest conception, a hybrid form, a "mixed, loaded dish" that can juxtapose modes of expression and

ideas in ways that are as unfamiliar and as surprising as a candelabra sprouting an animal head. Braund and Raschke (2002:71), in fact, explicitly note the grotesque nature of the genre, comparing it to a Frankenstein's monster: "a grotesque assembly of pieces cobbled together, even as ... the literary composition, the *lanx satura*, is a complex of traditions - satiric, epic, dramatic, rhetorical: a multi-faceted phenomenon ..."[51] Further, satire in Rome has consistently been identified as a "lower" genre—both Horace and Lucilius write it off as mere "chit-chat" rather than true verse—but one which can engage in surprising ways with that highest of genres, epic, with which verse satire consistently shares its meter and which Menippean satire frequently quotes and parodies in its verse passages. So much satire is written during the time of Nero then, because in many ways it is the perfect venue for the grotesque, the perfect genre for the Neronian program. Contrary to the traditional assumptions about Neronian era satire, Seneca, Persius, and Petronius are not "satirizing" Neronian culture; they are participating in it.

Much work has been done to set the record straight and to redefine the genres of Roman verse and Menippean satire in terms of the works themselves and what the satirists say they are doing. There are two arguments to be made here: first, that Roman satire's aim is not principally to "satirize" people, *mores*, or society from a morally correct perch; second, that verse satire and Menippean satire share generic points of contact that do not involve modern-style "satirizing" but make them similarly appealing to the Neronian grotesque program.

First we address the issue of whether Seneca, Persius, and Petronius were

[51] Braund and Raschke are writing specifically about Juvenal, though their observation I believe may be considered a generic one.

"satirizing" Nero. As with our look at Nero above, this will be a survey of what is generally accepted about Roman satire but frequently ignored when discussing the genre's manifestations in the Neronian era. It's not new or surprising to say that Roman satire doesn't necessarily "satirize," but it's an idea that disappears into the background when satire and Nero are combined. Since satire as a genre is something of a grotesque, hybrid, two-headed beast itself, the first part of this survey will address the two different brands of satire, verse and Menippean, one-by-one, principally because it is much more common to find modern critics writing about one or the other. I will then move on to the generic points of contact that, I believe, the two versions of satire share and that made satire attractive to Neronian writers participating in the grotesque program.

Verse satire, the mode of satire in which Persius works in the Neronian era, is satire written in hexameters, a meter shared with epic and didactic poetry. That format was apparently established by Lucilius, whose later books of satire were all in that meter.[52] We have a good idea about the nature of the genre and ideas about the meaning of the word *satura* from the fourth-century grammarian Diomedes:

> Satira autem dicta sive a Satyris, quod similiter in hoc carmine ridiculae res pudendaeque dicuntur; quae velut a Satyris proferuntur et fiunt, - sive satura a lance, quae referta variis multisque primitiis in sacro apud priscos dis inferebatur et a copia et saturitate rei satura vocabatur ... Sive a quodam genere farciminis, quod multis rebus refertum saturam dicit Varro vocitatum ... Alii autem dictam putant a lege satura quae uno rogatu multa simul comprehendat, quod scilicet et satura carmine multa simul poemata conprebenduntur.

[52] Ennius, Lucilius' predecessor in the genre, wrote in different meters including sotadean and iambic trimeter; Lucilius also used other meters in his earlier books, including trochaic septenarii and iambic senarii.

(GLK I: 485-486)

> Satire is so called either from satyrs, because in the same way in this verse ridiculous and naughty things are spoken of; these things are presented and fashioned as though by satyrs; or from a brimming dish which, chock full of various and abundant first fruits was offered to the gods in a ritual of the ancients, was called "satura" because of the abundance and saturation of the thing; or from a kind of sausage, which, chock full of many things Varro says was always called "satura" ... Others though think it was named after a law that is saturated with many things and brings them all together in one bill, because many verses are brought together in a work of satiric poetry.

Although Diomedes wrote in the fourth century, Coffey (1976: 13) makes a convincing case that he is drawing almost exclusively from Varro, one of the fathers of the genre. There are three essential qualities at play here in this definition of satire: humor, license (incarnate through satyrs), and stuffed super-abundance, with three of the four etymologies suggesting this last. Coffey (1976: 13-18) elaborates on the relative merits of these etymologies, dismissing the first and fourth. But whether or not the etymology itself holds water, it is important to remember that each of these is seriously suggested by a fourth century Roman who is very possibly quoting a founder of the genre. The Roman expectation of what satire was and did is contained in these etymologies, or they wouldn't exist. These three traits are important, bedrock elements of the genre, and a discussion of verse satire should always include them.

What's missing from this discussion so far is the idea of satire as a moralizing attack on vice. Returning to Diomedes, we find that it too has been incorporated into the genre:

> carmen apud Romanos, nunc quidem maledicum et ad
> carpenda hominum vitia archaeae comoediae
> charactere compositum, quale scripserunt Lucilius et
> Horatius et Persius; sed olim carmen quod ex variis
> poematibus constabat satura vocabatur, quale
> scripserunt Pacuvius et Ennius.
>
> Among the Romans there's a type of poetry, now indeed
> harsh and written to focus on men's vices with Old
> Comedy's stamp, the kind which Lucilius and Horace
> and Persius wrote; but back in the day the kind of verse
> which consisted of different poems was called satire,
> the kind which Pacuvius and Ennius wrote.

We have satire's origins as a "mixed dish" of a variety of poems; then, later, we have the addition of the idea of censuring men's faults in the manner of Old Comedy. When that "later" actually comes is a little more of an issue than Diomedes understands, probably because he is projecting Juvenal's influence on the genre back onto Persius and Horace's programmatic statements, which he in turn takes at face value.

In *Sermones* 1.4.1-7, the first of Horace's programmatic satires, Horace's description of Lucilius sounds a lot like Diomedes':

> Eupolis atque Cratinus Aristophanesque poetae
> atque alii, quorum comoedia prisca virorum est,
> si quis erat dignus describi, quod malus ac fur,
> quod moechus foret aut sicarius aut alioqui
> famosus, multa cum libertate notabant.
> hinc omnis pendet Lucilius, hosce secutus
> mutatis tantum pedibus numerisque; facetus ...
>
> Eupolis and Cratinus and Aristophanes
> and the rest of those men who created Old Comedy--
> if someone deserved to be written about
> because he happened to be trouble and a thief,
> a cheater or a killer or in some other way the subject of talk--
> they pointed it out with great license.
> Lucilius is completely dependent on them and followed them
> with only the meter changed. He was witty ...

While this might seem to be the introduction of the idea of the moralizing satirist, it's worth being cautious. It is clear from the fragments that remain that Lucilius did engage in *ad hominem* attacks. But Lucilius was friends with Scipio, and it is often difficult to distinguish between an attack for moral reasons ("satirizing") or out of simple personal and political loyalty:[53] "there is more of the flavor of Roman electoral technique in a fragment proclaiming that money (possibly for bribery) and canvassing reveal the qualities of a man."[54] It is conventional to think of satire as at least implicitly praising the virtue that is the other side of vice's coin, offering a solution. Lucilius doesn't seem to do that. To further call into question the idea of Lucilian satire as vehicle for moralizing, many of the fragments of Lucilius suggest the exact opposite, e.g.: "cum poclo bibo eodem, amplector, labra labellis fictricis conpono, hoc est cum ψωλοκοποῦμαι" (when I drink from the same cup, wrap my arms around her, lock lips (she's working me); that is, *quand je suis chaud*). As Coffey (1976: 52) notes, "To judge from the very imperfect transmission the poems of Lucilius contained in abundance the sensualist's rollicking description of pleasures and passions and also the moralizing satirist's condemnation of those in others. The two existed side by side in the corpus of his poetry. No one in antiquity, so far as we know, accused him of inconsistency, let alone hypocrisy." Were Lucilius truly and fundamentally a moralizer, it seems that the charge of hypocrisy would have been leveled at some point in his long literary afterlife. We have returned to the idea of satire as a genre stuffed full of various ideas, topics, and sentiments.

[53] Likewise, a similar argument could be made about Old Comedy, which is often less moralizing than it is political.
[54] Coffey (1976: 50).

It is also important to remember that Horace makes his remarks about Lucilius generally to set him up as a contrast to his own project in satire.[55] Lucilius' style and his sheer volume (again, an indication of *satura* as super-abundance) are contrasted with Horace's own approach, but Horace also contrasts what (he says) Lucilius did with his own, milder verse at lines 65-70:

> Sulcius acer
> ambulat et Caprius, rauci male cumque libellis,
> magnus uterque timor latronibus: at bene si quis
> et vivat puris manibus, contemnat utrumque.
> ut sis tu similis Caeli Birrique latronum,
> non ego sim Capri neque Sulci: cur metuas me?
>
> Sharp Sulcius goes around, and Caprius,
> shouting abusively and carrying indictments,
> each a great terror to criminals. But if someone
> lives rightly keeping his hands clean, he may give neither any thought.
> But even if you are like the criminal Caelius and Birrius,
> I am not like Caprius or Sulcius: why would you fear me?

This passage actually reads as a set up for some kind of moralizing--"if you live rightly, you've nothing to fear;" but instead of following with "but if you don't, I'll come after you" we get "but even if you don't, I'm not the kind of guy that will come after you."

There are also satires that have no aim at moralizing at all: 1.5 is an amusing account of a journey south with his friends; 1.7 a strange anecdote about a dispute in Brutus' camp that ends in a jokey punch line; and 1.8, a tale of witchcraft told from the point of view of a Priapic statue that ends in a fart joke. Coffey (1976: 95-96) adds to Horace's variety of subject matter this comment on variety of tone and

[55] Nettleship (1878: 14) describes Horace's satire as "a protest against that of Lucilius." That may be a bit strong, but he is right in noting that "the satire of Horace lacks, to a great extent, the element of invective."

versification: "Horace's tone ranges from vulgar farce in Satire 1,2 through the cynicism of Satire 2,5 to the mellowness of satire 2,6. A diversity of resources in versification matches the variations of verbal style ... Such variety is a mark of the controlled skill of a poet." Such variety is also the hallmark of this particular genre. The roots of satire lie in variety (and, occasionally, satyr-like license), and to these generic imperatives Horace added his own touch of occasional, gentle observations of the "foibles of man."

So none of our genre-defining satirists are true exemplars of the later concept of the moralizing satirist. Early on, the keynote was variety, a super-abundance of knowledge and subject matter, a wide-ranging variety of poems. Lucilius engaged in attack, but the personal and political nature of many of these, combined with his own glorifications of the kind of behavior a "satirist" would object to, deny him the position of a moral perch that often gets retro-fitted to him. When he attacks, he attacks rivals and enemies, his own and his friends'. Horace's *Sermones*, on the other hand, are more like mild "chats" about life in general, rather than "satires" taking a true moral stance, and they are often chats about and with friends. Persius had a better understanding of his generic predecessors than Diomedes (or most of us):

> secuit Lucilius urbem,
> te Lupe, te Muci, et genuinum fregit in illis.
> omne vafer vitium ridenti Flaccus amico
> tangit et admissus circum praecordia ludit ... (Satire 1, 114-117)

> Lucilius split the city,
> you Lupus, you Mucius, and broke his molar on them.
> Flaccus touched on every vice of his laughing friend, sly dog,
> and after he was in had his fun close to their hearts ...

Persius isn't here suggesting some sort of generic imperative of moral castigation. He's accurately describing the very different projects that Lucilius and Horace created: Lucilius sided with a faction and went after those on the other side; morality wasn't the issue--it was personal. Horace liked to play the role with his friends that his dad once played with him, but toned down: Horace doesn't shame--he makes them laugh. Given the specificity of these lines, it's remarkable how often commentators read them as a generic imperative to moralize and criticize the ills of society.

What satire does today, our idea of "satirizing," can be traced back through English satire of the Elizabethan period to the verse satire of Juvenal, but stops there:

> It is only with Juvenal (floruit ca. CE 100–ca.130) that verse satire in Rome takes on the specific set of traits that would come to characterize the genre, and dominate so much conventional satiric theory and writing, in the genre's second major flourishing in Elizabethan England. Horace and Persius performed their roles very differently. But much modern scholarship since the 1950s has downplayed these differences to leave the impression that Juvenal's performative habits are generally those of the genre itself, as one exemplary part that stands suitably for the whole. (Freudenberg, 2005: 14-15)

Juvenal, writing some five decades after Persius' death, made an indelible mark on verse satire and on our modern idea about the genre even beyond the Latin hexameter genre. It would be difficult to track down something identified as satire after him that does not "satirize" in our sense, and redefining the genre is one of his great achievements. His achievement was so thorough, in fact, that there is a strong

tendency to project his achievement into the past, and that is what frequently occurs in interpretations of Neronian era satirists.

Hooley (1997: 28), like Freudenberg, admits that "the satirist as right-thinking sayer of 'truth' about a society he and we know to be corrupt in all the usual, juicily decadent ways," is a "dubious conceptual model." And yet we have "*Faking it in Nero's Orgasmatron*" and "Persius saw Rome as ripe for satire"[56] from these two critics when writing specifically about Neronian satire. There is a domino effect: reflexive beliefs about Nero lead to "dubious" concepts about satire. The notion that satire is the poetic rendering of an outraged, decent man is as irresistible as the notion of a Nero gone wild with every kind of excess, too foolish to see himself as those around him do. When these two notions come into contact, when Neronian era satire is discussed, our critical faculties that warn us to be careful--about our construction of Nero and about our conceits based on the post-Juvenal genre of satire--are, apparently unconsciously, suspended. Neronian era satirists are satirizing—*our* satirizing—Nero and his age. Of course. What topic more ripe for (our notion of) satire than Neronian extravagance and excess, the kind we see (and--here--don't bother to question) in Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio?

If Roman verse satire is perhaps traditionally a little too uniformly defined (thanks to Juvenal) as a genre, its Menippean sister has proved more challenging to pin down. Even its name is confounding: Quintilian tells us that satire--both kinds--is a purely Roman invention, yet what we call Menippean satire is named for a Greek. Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria* 10.1), interestingly, does not call it this:

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[56] Freudenberg (2001: 151); Hooley (2007: 89).

"Alterum illud etiam prius saturae genus, sed non sola carminum varietate mixtum, condidit Terentius Varro ...." (that other, even earlier kind of satire, the mixed form, but not just in its variety of verses, Terentius Varro defined).[57] For Quintilian, the two "kinds" of writing were both satire and both shared that name; each one was "tota nostra."[58] Astbury (1999: 75) has a good sense of Varro's work that supports the Roman claim to creation of the genre: "What we find in Varro is not the continuation in Latin of a genre which had been written in Greek by Menippus but rather something new, created by Varro through the amalgamation of prosimetrum with the subject matter, literary techniques, and purpose of both Greek *σπουδαιογέλοιον* and Latin *satura*." So the operative word in Varro's title *Saturae Menippeae* is *saturae*; these are first and foremost satires, but with a difference that can be called "Menippean." That Menippean difference, Astbury goes on to suggest, is both particular to Menippus' use of prosimetrum and more general, using that author's name simply to invoke *σπουδαιογέλοιον* in general.[59]

If the Romans saw these two types of writing as two sides of the same coin, modern scholarship has generally chosen not to look for generic unity. In fact, the two modern scholars who have shaped much of the discussion of the genre, Frye

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[57] Varro wrote later than Lucilius, yet Quintilian describes Menippean satire as earlier (*prius*). I have taken this to mean that, just as Lucilius was not the first writer of verse satires but is considered by Quintilian to be the one who gave the genre its shape, so Varro was working in a kid of literature that in some way had previously existed (Q. may be thinking about Menippus) but was given its lasting form by that author.

[58] Relihan (1993:12) notes that "Menippean Satire" was not used as a generic term until 1581.

[59] As a parallel, Astbury notes that Horace refers to his work as *Bionei sermones* without indicating a close dependence on Bion's work but instead to invoke σπουδαιογέλοιον in general. The reference is from *Epodes* 2.2.60.

and Bakhtin, both choose to cut "satire" from their generic labels. Frye[60] especially contributed to generic awareness of Menippean satire. He (1957: 309) conceives of Menippean satire as essentially intellectual, rather than moral: "The novelist sees evil and folly as social diseases, but the Menippean satirist sees them as diseases of the intellect, as a kind of maddened pedantry which the *philosophus gloriosus* at once symbolizes and defines." Frye is working here from a scheme in which Menippean satire represents one of four types of fiction that both stand on their own and combine in various ways to account for all of fiction. The scheme trumps the individual text though, and the distinctions drawn among the genres demand a narrow definition for each of the four that seem to exclude any text as a representative of the "pure" genre. His new name for the genre is "anatomy," in the sense of a dissection or analysis, which is appropriate to the satirist's "intellectualized approach."

Bakhtin (1973: 93-97) renames the genre "Menippea" in his work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and provides us with a list of fourteen characteristics that Menippea share to a greater or lesser extent. The elements from that list that are pertinent to my thesis I will examine below in the discussion of the genre and its suitability to the grotesque. While Bakhtin's observations about "Menippea" are often astute and do help to define a somewhat unruly (sub)genre, there are also problems. Weinbrot (2005: 15) describes Bakhtin's vision of Menippean satire as "a

[60] Frye especially contributed to generic awareness of Menippean satire. His definition was expansive and included a wide range of texts, but his focus was not on ancient Menippean satire. I have chosen to focus on Bakhtin rather than Frye, both because Bakhtin's work is central to this thesis and because his ideas about "Menippea" have mostly eclipsed Frye's about "anatomy." For a fuller discussion, see Weinbrot (2005: 11-16) and Relihan (1993: 4-5 and 8-9).

cold moon, a satellite of the greater planet that both shines and shades it. At the Menippea's best, it leads to superior art, Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel." This does not do justice to Bakhtin's description of the genre, which is anything but cold and dark: "this carnivalized genre, extraordinarily flexible and as versatile as Proteus, and capable of penetrating other genres ... became one of the chief carriers and implementers of the carnival attitude towards the world and has remained so up until the very present" (1973: 93). The assertion of another genre's superiority, whether Bakhtin is valid in his belief or not, doesn't automatically weaken Bakhtin's observations about Menippean satire.

Relihan (1993: 8) better sees the real problem with Bakhtin's description: "a serious and unfortunate consequence of these[61] brilliant schemes of modern discourse is that the ancient texts are themselves deprived of a history and are presented as a unity, and our individual works are not so much subjected to analysis as used to exemplify elements important to the development of later literary traditions." Bakhtin is interested in "Menippea" as a sort of monolithic base from which modern authors (Dostoevsky specifically) are working and building. In a sense, to make his points about Dostoevsky, Bakhtin reverse-engineers his definition of Menippean satire. The list may fit the future genre better than it does individual satires from Rome.[62]

That being said, dropping the "satire" from Menippean satire serves a purpose and is an important comment on the genre for this argument: as Relihan

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[61] Relihan sees the same problem with Frye's concept of the genre.
[62] Bakhtin actually considers the Menippea to be a uniform genre beginning with Bion and Menippus in Greece.

(1993: 8) observes: "the elimination of the word satire from their names for the genre avoids the glib associations of social criticism that that word normally entails." That is, the term "satire" in modern parlance has developed a meaning, as noted above, that ancient satire, in this case Menippean, did not have. Since Menippean satire doesn't "satirize," it's useful to drop the word to avoid the association with that moralizing stance.

So what is Menippean satire? The baseline requirement is generally prosimetron, a combination of verse and prose. However, as Rimell (2005: 164) notes, this alone seems inadequate for the purposes of defining a genre. If Menippean satire isn't satire in the modern sense, and virtually all recent critics agree it is not, what is it up to? One thing Menippean satire does, rather than moralize, is challenge authority with laughter. This characteristic seems to be at the core of many critical definitions of the genre. For Bakhtin (1973: 88) Menippean satire is carnivalized literature. The spirit of carnival for Bakhtin, as we have already seen in his description of the grotesque, is a laugh in the face of authority, a popular, festive reordering of the world that overturns dogma and official culture, and "an indestructible vivacity and the mighty, life-giving power to transform." For Bakhtin carnival is transformative "yeast." Relihan (1993:28) sees Menippean satire as a challenge to all established truth:[63]

[63] Weinbrot (2005: 297) too describes Menippean satire as deploying incongruities (generic, linguistic, etc.) to "oppose a threatening false orthodoxy." His vision of the genre is much darker and closer to modern ideas of satire as moralizing, since he is primarily interested in (re)defining the genre in terms of eighteenth-century English satire, of course colored by Juvenal. Despite this dark and serious reading Weinbrot reaches a fundamental conclusion about Menippean satire shared by other critics of the genre: it engages with and attempts to subvert authority.

> Menippean satire is abnormal in all of its aspects. It is an anti-genre; insofar as it is satire, it is ultimately a satire on literature itself and all its pretensions to meaning, though burlesque would remain the better term. All is parody in the Menippean jeu d'esprit: the genre presents a battle of form and content, where all claims to perception, knowledge, and truth are negated by fantasy, form, style, language, and self-parody.

In this description I would say that he is very much of a mind with Bakhtin, though he has perhaps fused Bakhtin's ideas of carnivalized literature with Frye's "anatomy" in its focus on intellectual play.

So what does this two-headed genre of satire have to do with the Neronian grotesque? If we look to Quintilian for some kind of generic definition that includes the two forms of satire, we see that a wide range of subject matter is the standout feature. In discussing verse satire, Quintilian notes of Lucilius, the first great satirist, "et eruditio in eo mira et libertas atque inde acerbitas et abunde salis" (in him there was both a wonderful accumulation of learning and a wonderful freedom, and from these a sharpness and an abundance of wit). He calls Varro, his exemplar of Menippean satire "vir Romanorum eruditissimus" (the most learned man the Romans have produced). *Eruditio* and *eruditissimus* used of the two founders of the two branches of satire is telling--the distinguishing feature of the genre (at least for Quintilian) was how many different things you could write about. We have returned once again to the idea of *satura* as an overflowing dish, and this idea lends itself perfectly to the grotesque.

This idea of *satura* as an overflowing and varied dish offers us two metaphors simultaneously for the genre as a uniquely grotesque one (the genre is

like the mythical--and grotesque--hydra in its ability to sprout new heads). First is the idea of a feast. Satire is superabundant in its subject matter, message, tone, language, mode. The overflowing nature of satire, both kinds, is at the heart of Quintilian's admiration for the erudition of its founders. Muecke (2005: 43) and Henderson (2005: 311) give an indication of the great range of topics and styles employed by Lucilius for variety. The overflowing dish is at the root of Braund's (1992: 3) account of satire as a genre native to the city, which offered "an unrivalled richness of material to the satirist. The city is a melting-pot of people and things: people of all classes and origins and behavior, things from all over the world and with all kinds of associations. The city is where anything is possible, where any combination of people and things is imaginable." The mixed dish metaphor is at the root of Bakhtin's (1973: 97) and Relihan's (1993: 25) observations that Menippean satire incorporates and parodies other genres (tragedy, epic, Socratic dialogue, etc.). Bakhtin (1973: 89) also speaks of Menippean satires' rejection of a "limitation to a single style" and "multiplicity of tone," and includes this as part of his genre defining list: "the presence of inserted genres intensifies the variety of styles and tones in the Menippea" (1973: 97). It's at the heart of satire's rich variety of language, incorporating Latin and Greek[64], epic diction and vulgar speech, as Relihan (1993: 26) notes of Menippean satire: "vocabulary and grammar are allowed to be as fantastic as the action they describe, and are suffered to alternate in the wildest swings from grand to low style, from fustian to textbook simplicity, from the recherché to the banal;" verse satire's father, Lucilius, featured "technical words in

[64] Our two founding fathers, Lucilius and Varro, both incorporate Greek into their satires. Their Neronian successors all do so as well.

every art and business" according to Fronto,[65] and Braund (1992: 14) highlights his extensive use of Greek words and illustrates with a "striking" fragment that consists of "just four words, two in Latin and two compounded of Greek words (1048 W): *inberbi androgyni, barbati moechocinaedi*, 'beardless she-males, bearded sodom-adulterers'." Weinbrot (2005), speaking of satire in general, observes that "the concept of 'satire' indeed is amorphous and requires amplitude." Braund (1992: 7) sums up the idea: "But it is perhaps most appealing to view the satirist as a cook, serving up to his audience a sausage stuffed full of various ingredients--including, incidentally, a substantial quantity of feasting and food!" This literary feast, this *satura lanx*, is indeed a dish fit for the grotesque table with its love of feasting, abundance, and variety.

The *satura lanx* not only suggests an abundant feast, but variety: on one platter are combined many different items. Likewise the sausage given as another potential source for the word[66] and metaphor for the genre consists of a great assortment of ingredients assembled together to make one food. I would argue that another implication of *satura* as dish is hybridity: the superabundance of the nature of satire results in an often grotesque fusion of disparate elements. This is true in the genre itself: satire has two different branches that modern critics at least struggle to understand as fitting together under the umbrella of satire. Menippean satire's combination of prose and verse instantly marks it as a hybrid form of

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[65] In a letter to Marcus Aurelius (pg. 62 Naber).
[66] Diomedes (GLK I: 486) quoting Varro: "satura est uva passa et polenta et nuclei pini ex mulso consparsi. Ad haec alii addunt et de malo Punico grana" (*satura* is raisins and pearl barley and pine nuts doused with honeyed wine. To this some also add pomegranate seeds).

literature as well.[67] Varro, the father of Menippean satire, gave his satires hybrid titles, juxtaposing Greek and Latin and meaning, and further hybridizing through frequent use of compound nouns in those titles.[68] Braund (1992: 3-4) describes verse satire as "parasitic" in that it "continually exploits and re-uses other forms of discourse, both literary and non-literary, always in travesty, parody, or inversion." The prosimetron of Menippean satire, the dual registers of low speech and epic meter in verse, both serve to create in satire a hybrid genre.

Humor, discussed above as a key (sometimes underappreciated) element of each kind of satire, is an integral part of the grotesque, as we have seen. Increasingly critics are recognizing this element in satire and suggesting that the reading of satire needs to be more nuanced because of the satirist's humorous approach.[69] In Menippean satire, humor has more consistently been recognized as a crucial element, and it's no surprise that Bakhtin (1973: 94) puts it at number one on his list of elements that define the genre.

But humor in and of itself does not necessarily qualify a work or genre for the grotesque. The question is whether satire's humor is grotesque humor or not, and there are those who have specifically come out on the "not" side of this question, from Bakhtin himself and other critics of the grotesque, who draw a distinction

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[67] This hybridity is observed by Muecke (2005: 34), Henderson (2005: 311); Relihan (1993: 13-15) and Bakhtin (1972: 97) both note that a key component of Menippean satire is the juxtaposition of opposites of all sorts.

[68] See Coffey (1989: 154) for examples. Arguably, Seneca may have followed suit here, accounting for the commonly known title of his Menippean satire, *Apocolocyntosis*, and the less well-known *Ludus de morte Claudii*. It should be noted, however, as Athanassakis (1973:1) does immediately, that "only one late fifteenth century manuscript (Codex Vat. lat. 4498) contains the word Apocolocyntosis as part of the title."

[69] See Plaza (2006: 1-3).

between it and satire, to modern critics of classical literature like Paul Miller, who focuses specifically on Roman satire. Thomson (1972: 41-42) draws a distinction between satire and the grotesque, noting that ambivalence (Thomson calls this the "confusion of incompatibles") is not a feature of satire: "satire (and we are of course talking about model cases) aims at two reactions from the audience: laughter, and anger or disgust, but it aims to produce them separately. The grotesque, as we have seen repeatedly, produces a confusion of reaction." This reading seems to correspond in large part to Bakhtin's rejection of satire as grotesque, but Thomson's "confusion of incompatibles" isn't quite on a par with Bakhtin's notion of ambivalence (it's not generative) and, more to the point, Thomson is clearly speaking about satire as a moralizing form of literature.

Miller (2005) specifically rejects the application of the term “grotesque” to any Roman (verse) satire. His objection is consistent and grounded in a very strict reading of Bakhtin, without applying Bakhtin's own disqualification of satire. For Miller, Roman satire is not grotesque in Bakhtin's sense of the word because it lacks the virtue of rebirth and renewal that needs to accompany its imagery. This seems an overly strict interpretation, and one that is possibly wrong. Bakhtin's point consistently is that ambivalent, grotesque imagery always carries the seeds and the promise of rebirth and renewal, and that that promise was commonly understood and accepted (see, for example 1968*:* 430). The point was not that the "plot" resulted in rebirth, but that there was automatically a "regenerating and renewing

element of the images, already lost in Europe's literary consciousness" (1968: 152).[70]

I would argue that the humor in Neronian era satire is, in fact, suitable to the grotesque; the objections of Bakhtin are based on the post-Juvenal concept of satiric humor, which he contrasts with carnival folk style humor: "We must stress, however, that the carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time."[71] Remembering that grotesque humor is carnival humor, the question is whether satire's humor has the potential to renew. Post-Juvenal satire's humor may not be generative:[72] it ridicules vice from an outsider's perspective, and if its goal is to achieve anything beyond that ridicule, the goal is retrograde--a return to better times. Carnival humor, on the other hand, is intended to create while it destroys, to produce something (re)new(ed). Moralizing satire creates and looks back on corpses; grotesque humor must offer more. Satire, as we have seen, has a much greater range than is often accorded it. Relihan (1993: 22) argues that (Menippean) satire is a "genre that takes nothing, including itself, too seriously." Braund (1992: 3) points out that too often in satire a moral is sought out at the expense of understanding the humor. If satire didn't have to moralize in the time of the Neronian era, pre-Juvenal, then it was free to deploy its humor in a grotesque

[70] More on Miller's approach to verse satire and the grotesque will be said in the chapter on Persius.
[71] Bakhtin (1968: 11).
[72] See Miller (2001) for a contrast between Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque and similar imagery, without the renewal, he finds in Juvenal's satires.

manner. Not coincidentally, perhaps, an early meaning of *satura* was "pregnant;"[73] satire was not only abundant, it was potentially full of renewed life in the form of laughter, debasement, and renewal.

Humor is a key element of the genre that lends itself to a grotesque program. All of the Roman verse satirists who have come down to us intact offer programmatic statements about their satire[74], and all three of them include humor and laughter as part of the program.[75] Following Plaza[76] (2006), I would suggest that the theory of incongruity[77] functions best with Neronian era satire, both verse and Menippean. In this theory, humor is generated by transgression of rules and norms. Neronian era satire is replete with verbal, generic, and visual incongruities. The Neronian grotesque was transgressive in its rejection of traditional Julio-Claudian patterns of behavior and aesthetic principles, and often achieved its effect of revolution and transgression through incongruous juxtaposition of the new, Neronian model with the traditional one. A reading of Neronian satire's humor that focuses on incongruities and transgressions without assigning a moral tag to them frees the satire from the anachronistic requirement of moralizing and simultaneously aligns the satire with grotesque values of festive transgression of the norms of official (in our case, traditional) culture.

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[73] Gratwick (1982: 162).
[74] Griffith (1970: 67-68) also attempts a sort of reconstruction of a programmatic statement, again including humor, from fragments of Book XXX of Lucilius.
[75] Horace *Sermones* 1.1 and 1.10, Persius Satire 1, Juvenal Satire 10.
[76] Our conclusions about the effect of the incongruities are quite different however.
[77] Plaza's application of this theory is based on the one formulated by Susan Purdie (1993), *Comedy: the Mastery of Discourse.*

Finally, satire's status as a "lower" genre and its embrace of common language and theme lends itself admirably to the grotesque. As we have seen, grotesque language and imagery are the language and imagery of "the marketplace," the common man. To be grotesque a genre must embrace this lower register. Lucilius and Horace both describe their satires as a lower genre, as *sermones* eschewing the diction of true poetry in favor of plainer speech.[78] Martial 12.94 sets out a list of genres in descending order, and satire ranks close to the bottom:[79]

> Scribebamus epos; coepisti scribere: cessi,
> aemula ne starent carmina nostra tuis.
> transtulit ad tragicos se nostra Thalia cothurnos:
> aptasti longum tu quoque syrma tibi.
> fila lyrae movi Calabris exculta Camenis:
> plectra rapis nobis, ambitiose, nova.
> audemus saturas: Lucilius esse laboras.
> ludo levis elegos: tu quoque ludis idem.
> quid minus esse potest? epigrammata fingere coepi.
>
> I was writing epic; you started writing them; I gave way
> so my poems wouldn't be in competition with yours.
> My Muse tried tragedy on for size:
> you followed suit too.
> I strummed lyric songs the way Calabrian Muses do:
> you stole my new pick, you show-off.
> I take a chance on satire: you make every effort to be a Lucilius.
> I'm fooling around with light elegy: you do the same.
> Can there be anything lower? I start putting together epigrams.

Martial's question "quid minus esse potest?" makes it clear that this list of genres is in order high to low, ranking satire below epic, tragedy (and possibly comedy too, since that's Thalia's traditional area) and lyric. Muecke (2005: 34), speaking of verse satire, describes it as a poetic genre "so low as almost to verge on the prosaic;"

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[78] Lucilius at fr. 1039-40; Horace at *Sermones* 1.4.56-62

[79] Martial's own genre, the epigram, occupies the bottom. It seems humorous poets are fond of a (tongue-in-cheek) disavowal of generic worth!

and Relihan (1993: 25) calls Menippean satire a "vast burlesque ... by the general term burlesque we avoid the implications of unintentional literary structures, or of intellectual profundities."

The language of this low genre can be marked by colloquialism and even obscenity (Muecke, 2005: 36-37), and Bakhtin (1973: 96-97) points out that "the 'incongruous world'--incongruous ... because it crudely violates etiquette--is also quite characteristic of the Menippea." Coffey (1976: 164) finds in Varro's Menippean satires "proverbs of everyday discourse, diminutives and other colloquialisms and also characteristic etymological word-plays. The free admixture of Greek words sometimes suggests the easy informality of the usage in Cicero's letters to Atticus." This low or common speech is found in all of the satirists that come before the Neronian era, from Ennius and Varro through Lucilius and Horace, the latter two pointing this out self-consciously with words like *sermones* and, in Lucilius' case, *schedium*, a Greek word implying his poetry is off-the-cuff.

Part of satire's "lowness" is its residency in the real world (artfully constructed, of course). That real world can be location--the city (Braund, 1992: 3), "brothels, dens of thieves taverns, market places, prisons" (Bakhtin, 1972: 94), or it can be the intrusion of real world sensibilities coloring the fantastic, as in the "council of the gods" scene in Lucilius' first book (fr. 24-27 are an amusing example of the high brought low). The real world is also present in the functions of the body (eating, drinking, sex, urination, etc.). An example from Lucilius (fr. 1183): "Perminxi lectum, inposui †pedem† pellibus labes" (I completely pissed the bed, I put stains on the skins). The bed in Horace's satire about his very real-world

journey to Brundisium (1.5.84-85) fares even worse; after being stood up on a rendez-vous, Horace tells us he goes to sleep, "tum immundo somnia visu/nocturnam vestem maculant ventremque supinum" (then dreams with filthy images stain my pajamas and my stomach (I was lying on my back)). Bakhtin (1972: 110) speaks of the Menippea's "concretely sensuous plane of images and events," and also describes Varro's satires as a "'Diary of a Writer' (albeit with a sharp preponderance of the carnivalistic-comical element)" (1972: 97). Returning to epic as contrast, Connors (2005: 144) lays out the immediacy of the genre: "Epic poetry explains how the world order came to be; satire gives a particular slice of the here and now ... satire can swallow epic elements whole and reconfigure epic's cosmos-ordering world views as glimpses of Rome's everyday chaos." The grotesque is never about closed systems (like epic world-views), but about the messy, unruly, leaky and constantly transforming "everyday chaos." This low, real-world genre is uniquely suited as a vehicle for grotesque imagery and ideas.

Elements of the grotesque have been identified in Neronian era literature before, but often the version of the grotesque applied is Kayser's: these grotesque elements portray a world out of joint and create on some level a sense of unease. Callebat even sees the grotesque as a current throughout Latin literature, including Petronius and Persius. Callebat, however, does not see laughter as a real part of this formula, nor renewal, but instead a disorienting destabilization of the familiar world: "la dynamique ainsi créé n'est pas celle, vitale, du baroque, mais celle d'une fébrilité mécanique, génératrice possible du comique, mais plus encore d'un insolite inquiétant" (1979: 106). Maes (2008: 317) uses the term "grotesque" specifically of

Neronian literature, and correctly identifies Neronian writers' desire "to undo everything that is classical and Augustan," but doesn't see much more in this than a desire for novelty or, like Callebat, the desire to portray a world gone wrong:

> the deformation and mutilation of the body that is so important a theme in Neronian literature, the moral seriousness that drives these authors on, the grossness of the exaggerations, the amount of shocking detail, the grandeur of the unexpected or the striving and longing for the sublime that is always again undercut by the clever presentation, as well as the moral alienation and distancing of the reader from the world that is represented, all combine to form a truly grotesque vision of the world. The witticisms that surface, even at emotionally very charged moments or during sickening descriptions of terrible abominations, have the effect of intensifying the cruelty and tragedy. (2008: 320)

Missing from these discussions of Neronian literature and the grotesque is the fundamental component of laughter identified by Bakhtin and integral to satire. Both Callebat and Maes admit the potential of the grotesque to provoke laughter, but for them the grotesque is fundamentally dark, trending towards the horrible. This view of the grotesque seems a natural one to combine with the traditional readings of Nero as monster and Neronian society as sick and degenerate.

Essentially, in the traditional reading of Neronian era satire we have an (at least partially) anachronistic definition of satire and what it does operating alongside unquestioned assumptions about Nero, Neronian culture, and the way his contemporaries felt about them, all based on a face-value reading of sources we know to be rhetorical constructs. Nero is a pervert, a fool, and a pretender, despised by the intellectuals of his day and too much in love with himself to see that. Everyone around Nero is playing along, exchanging knowing glances, mocking him

in the literature he fails to understand. Our ingrained ideas about who Nero was combine with our post-Juvenal notions of satire's role in literature and the result is repeated again and again: Petronius and Persius (to a lesser extent, perhaps, Seneca) are "satirizing" Nero and Neronian culture. Right under the boy-emperor's nose an intellectual and literary resistance was taking place, fought on the very battlefield that Nero claimed (ridiculously!) as his own. But if we accept the well-supported idea that Nero was neither a monster nor a failure as an artist and the critical consensus that, at the time of Persius, Petronius, and Seneca, satire was not necessarily "satirizing," we return to our original question: why so much satire (whatever that is) during the time of Nero? What was it about the genre that made it a frequent choice of Neronian era writers?

Moving on from this general discussion of the genre of satire and its suitability to the grotesque, I will now examine each Neronian era satirist in turn through the lens of the grotesque to see how these satirists can be read differently, more humorously, and most importantly, as part of a larger program of aesthetic goals that were part of Nero's plan for the representation of his "Golden Age."

Chapter 2: Claudius' Grotesque Corpse and Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis:* A New Aesthetic is Born in a Dung Heap

Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, the first manifestation of satire in the reign of Nero, is prototypical of the themes and the approach of satire in the new regime and, in fact, very much in harmony with the Saturnalian mode of Neronian self-representation in general. Neither the authorship nor the date of the *Apocolocyntosis* is certain, but this thesis follows the widely accepted identification

of Seneca as its author and a date very early in the reign of Nero.[80] The satire describes the emperor Claudius' death, followed by his arrival in the heavens and his attempt to claim divine status, aided by the god Hercules. After a very worldly, senate-style council of the gods, culminating in the divine Augustus' debut speech scuttling Claudius' chances, Claudius makes his journey down to the underworld. He encounters his own funeral--it's a party--on the way, then faces judgment. His punishment is the Sisyphean task of eternally trying to throw dice using a bottomless dice box, but he's soon claimed by Caligula as a former slave and put to work clerking for his freedman.

It's an unusual piece of work--Whitton (2013: 151) calls it "baffling"--and that may account for the wide range of ideas about the satire's "purpose" that have been proposed. Some wish to give the *Apocolocyntosis* a primarily political thrust, natural perhaps, because it focuses on a political figure and also because that is often what satire is supposed to do, as we have seen.

Even if many agree that the *Apocolocyntosis* is a political satire, agreement on the politics has been elusive, and the satire has become a many-headed Hydra of possible meanings. Griffin (1976: 129) evades the difficulty, sticking to the neutral acknowledgement that "Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, as all would admit, has its serious political side." But the political interpretations run a wide spectrum. As an attack

[80] For Seneca's authorship, see Ball (1902: 23-48); Eden (1984: 6-8). On the date of 54, at the beginning of Nero's reign, see Griffin (1976: 129-130); Eden (1984: 12) and Nauta (1987: 69-84). More will be discussed about the date below as well. Whitton (2013: 151) doesn't bother tracing the arguments anymore; for him, on Senecan authorship and the date of 54 there are "few doubters."

on Claudius, some[81] have suggested that the satire is ultimately meant to function as a sort of negative to the positive of Seneca's *de Clementia*: the *Apocolocyntosis* is a manual on how *not* to govern.[82] But Athanassakis (1973: 47) feels that "the didactic element in the *Apocolocyntosis* is either so carefully veiled as to elude detection or merely non-existent." He comes out in favor of the latter.[83] Braund and James (1998) read Seneca's representation of Claudius' body specifically as grotesque, but their conclusions run more in keeping with traditional Roman views of the body, suggesting this "iconoclastic"[84] representation of Claudius' body ultimately is loaded with political and ethical freight demonstrating his unfitness for rule. Whitton (2013: 152ff) takes the attack on Claudius a step further, suggesting that "the *Apocolocyntosis* adds up to a strong endorsement not just of Nero but of monarchy as an institution" by discrediting Claudius, essentially removing him from the imperial equation. That is something of a point in Nero's favor, for a change, but Whitton's point is more about Seneca's interest in justifying the principate; his reading does not allow a particularly positive view of Nero himself.

Beyond lampooning Claudius,[85] some have seen in the satire an attempt to target Agrippina, thus weakening her hold on the young emperor.[86] That reading is

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[81] e.g. Nauta (1987), Braund and James (1998: 291-297), Weinbrot (2005: 46).
[82] Marti (1952), Griffin (1976: 130), and Nauta (1987). More on Nauta's interpretation at the end of this chapter. Eden (1989: 12) also sees the primary function of the *Apocolocyntosis* as complementary to the *de Clementia.*
[83] See also Whitton (2013: 155).
[84] Braund and James (1998: 284).
[85] Even this is not necessarily a given. Relihan (1993: 77-87) has an interesting reading suggesting that Claudius is the "hero" of the satire. More on this will be explored below.
[86] Viedebantt (1926); Barwick (1943: 168-172); this interpretation is rejected by later commentators such as Eden (1984) and Coffey (1989).

directly reversed by Kurfess (1924: 1309-1311) who reads the satire as an oblique defense of Agrippina because it supports and attempts to make popular the official story of Claudius' death and therefore offers a public antidote to the charge of poisoning. Kraft (1966) even suggests that Britannicus is Seneca's primary target and that the issue at hand is Claudius and Britannicus' status as "Claudian" instead of "Julian", making the satire a defense of Nero's claim to the principate,[87] though Coffey (1989: 262) rejects this as "over-subtle."[88]

Others read the satire as targeting broader societal ills created by the principate. Whitton (2013: 151) says that the work "subjects imperial apotheosis to an extraordinary slapping;" it seems hard to argue against some sort of mockery of the imperial cult and divinization,[89] either specifically on the deification of Claudius (thus a primarily political take on the subject) or more generally as a Stoic rejection of the practice altogether.[90] Coffey (1989: 172) prefers a more broad (or vague) approach, acknowledging the "many-sided subtleties" of the work. Weinbrot (2005: 49-50) in his moralizing reading of the satire concludes that "the *Apocolocyntosis* clearly is a satire that affirms justice," but one that ultimately is unable "to change enduring human moral vulgarity." Not surprisingly, he ends his discussion with a dig at Nero, though he does not read Seneca's work as having that purpose.

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[87] Russo (1964: 13) suggests that the *Apocolocyntosis* could in part have lent some legitimacy to Nero's position versus Britannicus', but does not stress this as the purpose of the satire as Kraft does.
[88] Agreed. Kraft's argument on some level also contradicts itself. In his division of who's Julian, he relies to a great extent on adoption (1966: 101-102), but his argument that Britannicus is a threat to Nero rests heavily on the idea that Nero's adoption makes his claim to status as *filius divi* weak (1966: 121-122).
[89] But Relihan (1993: 79) specifically rejects this idea.
[90] e.g. Duff (1936: 93-94).

Weinbrot (2005: 46-50) and Hooley (2007: 147) exemplify the more recent trend of reading all satire from the imperial era as subversive and directed at the principate as an oppressive institution: Weinbrot feels that the satire suggests "the familiar pattern of praise and blame that typifies Roman formal satire and that seems to be present even in the fragments of Varro's *Saturae Menippeae* ... Like Varro, to some degree like Horace and more so like Persius and Juvenal, Seneca nostalgically invoked a past norm to counter the threat from the present that might affect the future" (Weinbrot, 2005: 46). For Hooley, the birth of the *Apocolocyntosis* in the reign of Nero, whom he consistently paints with Suetonian strokes, means that it must be satirizing, in the modern sense, its patron as well as its target: "just as Persius had been able to take effective satire into the very heart of Nero's world, the art and sensibility the emperor fostered, Seneca seems able here to do something similar…this philosophical mentor knew his pupil well and didn't mind, carefully, letting others in on what he'd seen" (2007: 147). Robinson (2005: 254), too, believes that Seneca had the inside track on Nero's potential as monster and wrote his satire to reflect this. These readings are rare instances where Menippean satire is considered closely with its verse sibling, so Weinbrot and Hooley get points for thinking across the generic boundary more than most. Hooley also sees literary concerns—how and what one can write—as part of the overall political picture. Where each falters is in his unexamined assessment of Nero and an anachronistic assumption about satire.

Riikonen (1987) prefers to read the *Apocolocyntosis* almost purely in terms of generic considerations, doing a fairly strict reading of the satire through Bakhtin's

lens on Menippean satire. Riikonen (1987: 44) argues that attempts at reading the work as political or as the misbegotten child of a stoic writer "have completely missed the point: they have not understood how Seneca through his satire joins an important literary tradition outside normative poetics as well as traditions of popular humor, which was by no means restricted to the lower classes but also appeared at the summit of Roman society, as the numerous examples in Suetonius' Lives show." Similarly, Relihan (1993) approaches the work in terms of (his concept of) the genre of Menippean satire as an anti-genre that mocks the quest for certain knowledge. Setting the work in its generic context rather than its political or historical one yields very different fruit: "Claudius the fool reveals the foolishness of the worlds that presume to judge him, and there is some sympathy for this Claudius caught in these ridiculous worlds ... Menippean satire, a genre that makes fun of the quest for otherworldly knowledge, is alive and well in this tale of Claudius." Relihan's definition of the genre may be a bit narrow here, but his take on Claudius as a "hero" of Menippean satire is an interesting one, and he consequently accords the *Apocolocyntosis* more humor and a lighter, more festive tone than most do.

I contend that the *Apocolocyntosis* is programmatic of Neronian era satire and, more broadly, of the Neronian grotesque aesthetic. As most likely the first artistic work of the new era, it establishes certain key elements to the artistic expression of Nero's reign in general and, more specifically, to future work in satire. The *Apocolocyntosis* is representative of the Neronian grotesque in that it appropriates popular language and imagery, particularly of the body and its functions; it is Saturnalian in spirit; and it directly engages with Augustan culture.

Whether or not Seneca himself, as the early head of Nero's primary artistic circle, established these parameters with the *Apocolocyntosis* or was simply the first to give form to Nero's ideas about art and Augustan culture cannot be determined. Nevertheless, the *Apocolocyntosis* provides an early outline to the much fuller manifestation of the Neronian grotesque that was to come. As such, it is part of a continuum, a consistent mode of expression employed by the emperor and his associates; it is a satire produced for and under the auspices of the new emperor, rather than one about him or his age. In this chapter I will first lay out the *Apocolocyntosis'* embrace of various elements of the Neronian grotesque: its interest in the grotesque body and its ambivalence, its embrace of popular and vulgar imagery and language, and its Saturnalian spirit. As the first work of the Neronian era, its embrace of these elements may to some extent be considered the foundation of the Neronian grotesque in literature. I shall then move on to examine the implications that a grotesque reading of this satire has for understanding Neronian literature and Nero's engagement with his imperial predecessors.

Claudius' Gourdeous Body and the Material Bodily Lower Stratum

Characteristic of the Neronian grotesque is its embrace of all things popular. In Seneca's hands, the popular includes language—vulgarisms and proverbs[91] especially—and also imagery centered around the non-ideal body and its various functions. Almost always in the Neronian aesthetic, these popular elements are directly engaged and in contrast with the idealizing, aristocratic aesthetic of

[91] For a list of proverbial expressions used in the Apocolocyntosis, see Riikonen (1987: 47-48).

Augustan culture. In the *Apocolocyntosis,* Seneca has assumed a polar position to the Augustan aesthetic in almost every way. This, I would say, is Nero's (and by extension, Nero's circle's) ultimate goal in appropriating popular culture. Nero himself was reputedly a fan of things popular, but that doesn't make him populist. The appeal to Seneca's audience of popular culture in the context of a work like the *Apocolocyntosis* is that it stands in sharp contrast to the Augustan ideal.

As we have seen, central to the grotesque aesthetic is the grotesque body, and the grotesque body at the center of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* is, of course, the body of the emperor Claudius. The title *Apocolocyntosis* is meant to suggest immediately a grotesque representation of Claudius' body. Too often, scholars ignore the visual impact and the physicality of the title, in favor of a somewhat tenuous reading of a gourd (specifically, a *cucurbita*) as proverbial for "stupid." Ball (1902: 51) takes as a given that "the *κολοκύντη* among the Greeks and the *cucurbita* among the Romans, like the cabbage-head among us, was a type of stupidity,"[92] though Coffey (1989: 167) and Eden (1984: 3) note that there is little real evidence for *cucurbita* serving this function in Latin and none for κολοκύντη in Greek. It's not much of a joke, aside from the amusing coining of the word itself,[93] and it's not much of a transformation either: Claudius is no more foolish after he dies than before he

[92] Norrman and Haarberg (1980) 55-56 assert the certainty of the pumpkin's implication of stupidity. However, they also note the "high horticultural status" of cucurbits and suggest that, in Seneca's attack on Claudius, the author "needed something not only with as low a semiotic value as possible but with as high a semiotic value as possible at the same time."

[93] One is reminded of Varro's practice in his Menippean satires of using double titles, one in Latin and the other in Greek, often a compound word. Often the two titles do not clearly mesh. The Latin title that often accompanies Seneca's work, usually written off as a scholiast's note/interpolation, is *Ludus de Morte Claudii*.

dies. Coffey's (1989: 168) suggestion for the choice of a gourd is typically uninspired in its search for the reason (and humor) behind the choice of title: "perhaps Seneca chose the pumpkin as the means of ridiculing Claudius' divinity, on the grounds that it would be difficult to think of anything more lacking in positive characteristics than a pumpkin. It seems also that, just as in England children often find the word 'sausage' grounds for a giggle or guffaw, there was something intrinsically comical about a pumpkin…." But it seems that Seneca is in fact perfectly capable of thinking of things more objectionable than pumpkins, even within this work.

The *cucurbita* is such a specific choice that a specific point of connection and meaning for Claudius transformed into a gourd/pumpkin is wanted. The *cucurbita* is described as phallic or testicular shaped, spherical, and containing "aqueously mushy contents" (Eden, 1984: 3). All of these descriptions play well with the imagery of the grotesque: they are vegetative incarnations of the center of the grotesque body, the stomach, the phallus, the testicles. Further, their mushy seed-bearing contents are suggestive of life and growth once the gourd is broken open, and this presents the reader with a body poised on that line between life and death. Braund and Raschke (2002: 79) assert that "Grotesqueness, whether associated with architecture or monsters, is primarily identified by the visual faculty." I believe the visual impression made by the title must surely begin by likening Claudius' *body* (not his mind) to a pumpkin or gourd in all of its misshapen indignity. It is possible

to read a more esoteric, inside joke[94] into the title as well. Pierre Grimal (1954: 379) suggests a gentler, more cerebral reading of the title. He focuses on the spherical nature of the *cucurbita* and suggests, appropriately for the Stoic Seneca, that this is a humorous play on Claudius' apotheosis as a *Stoic* god. The real joke then would be the comparison of Claudius, an almost-spherical gourd, to a "real" stoic god in the perfect shape of a sphere. This comparison is made explicitly at 8.1-2, but there this particular joke is passed over by Seneca in favor of something a little less esoteric: "Stoicus? Quomodo potest 'rotundus' esse, ut ait Varro, 'sine capite, sine praeputio'? Est aliquid in illo Stoici dei, iam video: nec cor nec caput habet" (a Stoic (god)? How can he be "spherical", as Varro says, without head, without foreskin? There is something of a Stoic god in him, I see it now: he has no sense and no soul). This is the ideal place to untangle the humor of the title if it is some kind of Stoic joke, but the actual joke made here would interfere with that understanding. Athanassakis (1973: 3) makes an attractive and very grotesque suggestion that the title is a pun within a pun: Claudius dies after he farts and defecates; thus he arrives in heaven ἀπο κόλου, "thanks to his intestines." This type of joke is erudite in its Greek punning but much more suitable overall in its tone and in its fundamentally grotesque nature to the satire on the (w)hole.

It seems clear that the title's joke, in addition to the pun itself, revolves around the visual image of Claudius the go(ur)d. I would argue that this is an initial, humorous foray into an ongoing engagement between the Neronian court with its Augustan predecessor about the imperial body and its representation. The body of

[94] The *Apocolocyntosis* was, at least in its initial creation, most likely exactly that: an inside joke, penned at court for the court.

the emperor, like the body of the god it would become, was represented in accordance with conservative Roman aristocratic ideology combined with classical idealism: the body is a self-contained, closed system, ideal in proportion and eternally unchanged; it is perfect.[95] For Claudius, we have his representation as Jupiter (Figure 5) as an example of the Julio-Claudian ideal. From the standpoint of traditional Augustan culture, Claudius' body is an embarrassment: "the impact of Greek ideas of the perfection of the physical form, so obvious from Augustan statuary, must also have affected attitudes towards the body and disfigurement."[96] From the standpoint of traditional, official culture, Claudius' body could not be represented as sick, weak, or disfigured. Often a reading of the *Apocolocyntosis* looks at Claudius' portrayal simply from this point of view, but I would argue that there is more going on with Claudius' body here than simply a savage bit of imperial prejudice.

Through the lens of the grotesque the title becomes much more than just a throwaway joke. In the grotesque, the body is, or becomes, an open rather than a closed system. The body either is or is in the process of becoming porous, leaky, penetrable:

> the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus. These two areas play the leading role in the grotesque image, and it is precisely for this reason that they are predominantly subject to positive exaggeration, to hyperbolization ... Next to the bowels and the genital organs is the mouth, through which enters the world to

[95] See Zanker (1998: 98-100).
[96] Alston (1998: 216).

> be swallowed up. And next is the anus. All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation. This is why the main events in the life of the grotesque body, the acts of the bodily drama, take place in this sphere. Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body--all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all these events the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven.
>
> (Bakhtin, 1968: 317)

Claudius as a gourd is a physical manifestation of the stomach, phallus, or testicles; further, he carries seeds and the mushy, fertile goo inside him to feed those seeds. Norrman and Haarberg (1980: 56) suggest that the cucurbitic *Apocolocyntosis*[97] would also conjure associations with fertility and femaleness. Thus, at the moment of Claudius' *apocolocyntosis*, his death, we have a body that becomes penetrable and porous, male and female, phallic and fertile. When the gourd is broken, when the emperor dies, we have the possibility for new life, and the fertilizer provided by the go(ur)d himself!

That this interpretation is viable is supported by the description of Claudius' death in the *Apocolocyntosis:*

> Et ille quidem animam ebulliit, et ex eo desiit vivere videri. Exspiravit autem dum comoedos audit, ut scias me non sine causa illos timere. Ultima vox eius haec inter homines audita est, cum maiorem sonitum emisisset illa parte qua facilius loquebatur: "vae me, puto, concacavi me." Quod an fecerit, nescio: omnia certe concacavit. (4.2-3)

[97] See also Haarberg (1982: 109-114).

> And in fact he did burble out his last breath, and from that moment he stopped seeming to be alive. Furthermore, he breathed his last while listening to comic actors, so you know I'm not scared of them without a good reason. His last words among men were heard, when he had let loose a major blast from the end which he spoke more easily from: "Oh crap, I think I shit myself." Whether he did, I don't know: he sure turned everything else into a pile of shit.

Beyond the simple, comically crude description of Claudius' passing, at the moment of his death he is leaky and uncontained, very un-godlike, very un-Augustan. He "burbles out his last breath," a colloquialism[98] that here serves to echo and mirror his farting and defecation at the instant of his death. Claudius is a smashed gourd, leaking out "aqueous mush" from both ends. The grotesque image is reinforced here by further conflating head with ass in the debasing joke that gives his ass the power of speech. Braund and James (1998: 300) in discussing the grotesque nature of Claudius' body make an interesting connection to criticism on Falstaff:

> While accepting this emphasis upon Claudius' vacuity,[99] we need not exclude the grotesquely physical. Bristol's discussion of Shakespeare's Falstaff provides a useful analogy. Bristol observes that "Falstaff is mainly described as a series of large vessels or containers filled with vile excremental matter" and that this denunciatory language "is suddenly interrupted with an image of savory, festive abundance. This is the language Bakhtin identifies as belonging to the 'lower bodily stratum,' in which degraded excremental images coexist with images of the digestive organs that consume food—dead meat—and turn it into 'beastliness' which is both living flesh and bodily waste." Claudius can readily be aligned with Falstaff when we combine his

[98] Eden (1984) 80.
[99] They have been discussing Athanassakis' idea about *apocolocyntosis* implying an empty gourd functioning as a ball or plaything.

> "pumpkinification" with Suetonius' characterization of him as "very eager for food and drink at any time and place" (Claud. 33.1) and with Seneca's emphasis on his corporeality.

So Claudius becomes a leaky container for both excrement and abundant life. The scatological imagery of Claudius' death is itself a trope common to various incarnations of the grotesque and one that is constantly in play throughout the *Apocolocyntosis*:

> images of feces and urine are ambivalent, as are all the images of the material bodily lower stratum; they debase, destroy, regenerate, and renew simultaneously. Death and death throes, labor, and childbirth are intimately interwoven. On the other hand, these images are closely linked to laughter. When death and birth are shown in their comic aspect, scatological images in various forms nearly always accompany the gay monsters created by laughter in order to replace the terror that has been defeated. Bakhtin (1968: 151)

On one level, Claudius in the *Apocolocyntosis* serves as the "gay monster" that is to be defeated. His death and degradation turn the terrors of his reign (and his predecessors')[100] into laughter, and the act of defecation itself, even as it degrades the monster, is symbolic of new life and fertility to come. That this type of imagery bore such freight in the context of marketplace humor and carnival spirit, Bakhtin supports with multiple examples taken from classical sources and from Rabelais in

[100] For an expression of that terror, see Calpurnius Siculus, Eclogue 1.60-62: "nulla catenati feralis pompa senatus/carnificum lassabit opus, nec carcere pleno/infelix raros numerabit Curia patres" (no more will the funeral march of a senate in chains/exhaust the executioners' efforts, and the doomed Senate House will not reckon its nobles few while the prison's full). Athanassakis (1973: 50) notes that in both of Claudius' trials his prosecutors "bypass other aspects of his rule to turn their vindictive fingers to him as executioner."

which acts of urination and defecation are to be read as essentially productive.[101] One inspiration for a scene in Rabelais is an ancient myth describing the birth of Orion. In the myth, which seems to derive from folktale in its classic trope of gods gone visiting peasants, Jupiter, Neptune, and Mercury grant a poor old man's wish to be a father, but not a husband (again) by urinating on the hide of an oxen. The tale is told in Ovid's *Fasti* 5. 529-535:

> "… sed enim diversa voluntas
> est mihi: nec coniunx et pater esse volo."
> adnuerant omnes. omnes ad terga iuvenci
> constiterant—pudor est ulteriora loqui.
> tum superiniecta texere madentia terra:
> iamque decem menses, et puer ortus erat.
> hunc Hyrieus, quia sic genitus, vocat Uriona
>
> "... but in fact I have a different wish: I don't wish to be a husband, but a father." They all nodded. They all stood around the ox's hide--it's not proper to go any further. Then they covered the dripping thing with dirt thrown on top: ten months later and a boy was born. Hyrieus, because of how he was conceived, calls him Urione.

That such imagery was part of traditional Roman popular folktale type is indicative of the ambivalent place scatological imagery held in popular parlance. Ovid is too delicate, too "classical," to relate the actual act of urination in his version, aimed at taking its place in the more conservative official culture of Augustan Rome, but he is unable to suppress the positive, generative place the urine, as product of the functioning of the grotesque body, holds.

Athanassakis (1973: 18-22) suggests an ingeniously grotesque reading of Claudius' death and ascent to the heavens, reading a double meaning in "Claudius

[101] Bakhtin (1968: 147-151).

animam agere coepit nec invenire exitum poterat" (3.1) both as "Claudius began to give up the ghost, and could not make an end of the matter," and as "Claudius started pressing (his) wind, but could not find (a) passage (for it)." From there, Mercury is Claudius' intercessor because he farted in his Homeric Hymn, there is a play on the similar sounding *anus* and *annus*, puns on the names Augurinus and Baba ("Pissalot" and "Poo-Poo"), and a scurrilously filthy spindle, culminating in a double reading of Claudius' Homeric quote "με φέρων ἄνεμος" at 5.4 as a fart joke echoing *anima* at 3.1 and "the propulsion of a man to heaven by means of a mighty fart!" (1973: 29). Some of his reading may be a bit of a stretch, as he himself admits, but the punning on *anima* and *ἄνεμος* feels right in the context of Claudius' actual flatulent death in between the two passages, and the punning and the debased means of arrival in heaven are very much in keeping with the grotesque scatology that debases the concept of a Divus Claudius. Athanassakis probably owes a debt for this reading to Weinreich (1923: 53-55) who focuses on *animam agere* and suggests that a reading of Claudius' soul escaping from his butt is possible. Weinreich even labels this reading grotesque and compares the scene to one in Rabelais' *Pantagruel*. Claudius' death and defecation are both ultimately positive, popular images on multiple levels. First, they turn an object of fear into one of humor through degradation and laughter—the monster dies and we laugh. Second, the act of defecation is a promise of new birth and regeneration—Claudius is now a broken gourd, leaking his mush, and with that the seeds for new life. Here, at the moment he becomes a go(ur)d, he is transformed into something that will bring about regeneration. Coffey (1989: 167) notes that the Greek κολοκύντη, far from

representing stupidity, is actually associated with health.[102] In dying, Claudius promises life and health.

After death, Claudius continues to be associated with images of defecation. At the beginning of his trial before the gods as he speaks with Hercules at 7.3, Claudius realizes that "illic non habere se idem gratiae: gallum in suo sterquilino plurimum posse" (in that place he didn't have the same influence: a cock has the most power on his own little pile of dung). Here the humor operates on multiple levels simultaneously. The phrase reads like a legitimate popular saying, adding to the marketplace feel of much of the scene, with common, folksy language running through the mind of the would-be-divinized emperor. But *gallus* works to mock Claudius, born in Gaul rather than in Rome. The image of a dunghill works well to degrade Claudius and create laughter, for his "little pile of dung" is Rome. Here we find, subtly, the same ambivalent stance taken by the scatological in terms of marketplace humor. That we are meant to read it as such has already been suggested by its inclusion in a popular proverb (or at least an imitation of one). Claudius' death and defecation are recalled by the image of the cock/Gaul sitting in power over his dung heap. But again, with the image of death and Claudius the now defunct, comical monster, we have the promise of new birth and regeneration—Rome will grow anew from the dungheap left behind by Claudius. The fecal imagery continues in Claudius' solicitation of Hercules:

> Nam, si memoria repetis, ego eram qui tibi[103] ante
> templum tuum ius dicebam totis diebus mense Iulio et

[102] In support of this, he references Epicharmos 154 (105 Ahr. Lor): "ὑγιώστερόν θήν ἐστι κολοκύντας πολύ" (it's definitely much healthier ... gourds).

> Augusto. Tu scis, quantum illic miseriarum contulerim, cum causidicos audirem diem et noctem. In quod si incidisses, valde fortis licet tibi videaris, maluisses cloacas Augeae purgare: multo plus ego stercoris exhausi. (7.4)
>
> For if you go back through your memories, it was I who used to pronounce judgment in front of your temple for whole days in the month of July and August. You know how much complaining I withstood there, when I listened day and night to the lawyers; if you had fallen into that, though you think you're pretty strong, you'd have preferred to clean out the sewers of Augeas: I cleared out a lot more crap.

Here Claudius asserts parity with Hercules because he "cleared out more crap" than the hero did. Again, defecation is used to debase and to degrade; here, Hercules (in his least dignified, most debasing labor), Claudius, and the lawyers of Rome all get their share. Claudius, acting as judge, one of the capacities that he was best known for,[104] is reduced to cleaning out the shit that fills Rome (contrary to previous images in which he *concavit omnia*). Hercules, by association with Claudius, is comically degraded too: his least dignified labor is highlighted by Claudius in an embarrassing comparison to him, and the stables of Augeas have even been converted to *cloacas*, sewers, making the labor even more scatological than the original version.

The choice of Hercules specifically in this scene has a double significance. Hercules, as a paragon of strength and mythological slayer of beasts, is used as a foil for Claudius both in his weakness and in his monstrosity; he is also, as a popular,

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[103] The Teubner edition of the text adopts Bücheler's emendation *Tiburi* here. Along wth Eden, I have chosen to go with the original text here. More on this will be discussed later.

[104] For Claudius' fondness for presiding over trials, see for example Suetonius *Cl*. 14 and Dio 60.4.3.

marketplace god a figure who alternates between the heroic (or tragic) and the grotesque (or comic).[105] Thus Seneca can deftly place in juxtaposition these two modes with the god to parody and debase the heroic.

Hercules is a man who becomes a god, as Claudius would in reality. He is chosen specifically to contrast with Claudius and to demonstrate how unlikely a candidate he is for deification. Hercules is showcased as the diametrical opposite to Claudius' grotesque body. Hercules' strength and physical perfection stand in sharp contrast to the body of Claudius described throughout the *Apocolocyntosis*. Hercules' proverbial strength is contrasted implicitly with Claudius' failing, dying body. Upon Claudius' arrival on Olympus, he is unidentifiable to the gods because of his palsied head, his limping foot, and his stammered speech:

> nescio quid illum minari, assidue enim caput movere;
> pedem dextrum trahere. Quaesisse se, cuius nationis esset:
> respondisse nescio quid perturbato sono et voce confusa;
> non intellegere se linguam eius, nec Graecum esse nec
> Romanum nec ullius gentis notae. (5.2)
>
> He was making I don't know what kind of threat, for he was shaking his head nonstop; he was dragging his right foot. The messenger asked him his nationality: he answered I don't know what with a distressed sound and mixed-up speech; he didn't understand his tongue—he wasn't Greek or Roman or from any known people.

The monstrosity of Claudius' appearance is then amplified, as Jupiter sends Hercules to investigate, figuring that Hercules has seen it all:

> Tum Hercules primo aspectu sane perturbatus est, ut qui
> etiam non omnia monstra timuerit. Ut vidit novi generis
> faciem, insolitum incessum, vocem nullius terrestris animalis
> sed qualis esse marinis beluis solet, raucam et implicatam,

[105] Bakhtin references vases with images of "grotesque doublets (the comic Heracles and Odysseus)" and "the comic Heracles ... drunk and lying at the door of a hetaera while an old procuress empties a chamber pot on his head" (1968: 31; 148).

putavit sibi tertium decimum laborem venisse. (5.3)

> Then Hercules was really shaken at first sight of him, like one who has not yet been frightened by every monster. When he saw his strange looks, his unusual walk, his voice like no other animal on land but instead like one from below, hoarse and confused, he thought his thirteenth labor had arrived.

Claudius' appearance is so distorted that he is taken by Hercules to be a *monstrum* along the lines of the many-headed Hydra, triple-bodied Geryon (referred to by Hercules in 7 not by name, but as a *tergeminus rex,* highlighting his distinguishing, unnatural feature, or many-headed Cerberus[106] (whom we meet in 13 via a quote from Horace that gives him one hundred heads rather than the usual three), all mythological creatures with their own feet in the world of the grotesque.[107]

Davis (2006), in his contrast between ideal and grotesque bodies, considers the story of the painter Zeuxis (as told by Cicero, *de Inventione* 2.1) who, when painting Helen, used multiple human models, each for the particular perfection of a single body part. No human is capable of the kind of perfection represented by mythical divinity. It is interesting to note that, in effect, the same sort of anatomizing is being done to Claudius to reassemble him as a grotesque monster. Consistently throughout the *Apocolocyntosis*, Seneca highlights specific body parts as problematic: here the head, here the hand, there the mouth, there the feet. Thus Claudius becomes a series of *iuncturae acres* of ill-balanced parts. He is re-created

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[106] Trinacty (2012: 160) suggests that Seneca is identifying the emperor with Cerberus as "a murderous beast who deserves to be tormented in the underworld for eternity."

[107] Bakhtin (1965: 43) lists a variety of mythological hybrid type creatures in his discussion of the grotesque and Voltaire including Hercules' Hydra. For a more timely and popular example, such creatures as centaurs and satyrs appear frequently in Pompeian wall painting as well.

as the opposite end of the spectrum from the divine Hercules. From the first, at 1.2, we are given a look at the deformed Claudius: "idem Claudium vidisse se dicet iter facientem 'non passibus aequis'" (the same guy will say he saw Claudius making his way "with unequal steps"). This passage calls attention to one of Claudius' most distinctive physical imperfections, his limp, and does so in a mock-heroic context by echoing Vergil's *Aeneid* 2.724. Simultaneously Claudius is shown to be unworthy of a heroic context, and the joke is only rendered more acerbic by the fact that he is being likened to the toddler Ascanius. In Vergil, little Ascanius' steps are not matched to his father Aeneas'; here, the steps of Claudius' left foot are mismatched to his right.

Again, Claudius' limping gait and stuttering speech are singled out as dominant physical characteristics. After Febris intervenes in the conversation between Claudius and Hercules at 6.2, declaring him a Gaul, Claudius is simultaneously made frightening and comically degraded once more.

> Excandescit hoc loco Claudius et quanto potest murmure irascitur. Quid diceret, nemo intellegebat, ille autem Febrim duci iubebat. illo gestu solutae manus et ad hoc unum satis firmae, quo decollare homines solebat, iusserat illi collum praecidi.
>
> At this point Claudius flares up and rages with as much mumbling as he might. What he was saying, no one had a clue. In fact he was ordering Fever to be taken away. With that gesture of his shaky hand—steady enough for this one thing!—by which he usually took a load off men's necks—he had ordered her neck to be chopped.

Claudius is represented here at his most historically terrifying, easily angered and quick to execute.[108] But simultaneously, he is a figure of laughter through his grotesque portrayal: the obvious joke about his hand, ironically steady for the "off

[108] cf. Suetonius *Life of Claudius* 30

with her head!" move, is complemented by the more subtle choice of the word *murmure*: Claudius' stammer is hinted at in the repeated syllable mur-; thus, while a monster, Claudius is again painted as a comical one. Once more, this time in high tragic-style verse, Hercules himself notes Claudius' physical and vocal impediments:

> Quid nunc profatu vocis incerto sonas?
> Quae patria, quae gens mobile eduxit caput? (7.2)
>
> What do you now utter with unsteady pronouncement of voice?
> What fatherland, what nation issued forth thy shaky head?

Eden (1984: 93) notes that the humor and parody result from the style which "suits a superman confronting a monster, not a coward bullying a defenseless paralytic." The situation belongs more to the realm of the grotesque and the comic, and that is used to debase the higher, heroic mode of tragedy. This is the power of the grotesque: confronted with the classical, the heroic, it will almost inevitably succeed in eliciting laughter through the contrast, and that laughter signals the triumph of the grotesque mode. Claudius debases all he comes into contact with in this satire: Rome, Hercules, literally *omnia*. But because that debasing produces laughter and drives away fear, the renewal that is so crucial a feature of the grotesque results.

Judge Not ... Claudius' Divine Foils, Hercules and Augustus

In the spirit of this piece of popular Saturnalian literature, Hercules is chosen because of his identification as a god of the marketplace and, possibly, as a god connected to the holiday of Saturnalia specifically. Nilsson (1921: 201) suggests that the sacrifice to Hercules may have been included in Saturnalian festivities, noting that this is mentioned at Macrobius 3.11.10. That the Hercules sacred to the

Forum Boarium and the temple of Hercules Victor is being evoked is suggested by several details in Claudius' encounter with him. At 7.4 Claudius mentions dispensing justice before Hercules' temple.[109] Eden (1984: 96) suggests that the Temple of Hercules Victor is a likely choice, especially because of its proximity to the Palatine. Perhaps more to the point in terms of this text, the labor of Hercules that ties him to that area (related by Vergil, *Aeneid* VIII. 185-272) has just been recalled by Hercules himself in the verse passage in 7.2:

> Edissere. Equidem regna tergemini petens
> longinqua regis, unde ab Hesperio mari
> Inachiam ad urbem nobile advexi pecus ...
>
> Expound. Indeed, seeking the realms of the triplicate
> king, far-distant, whence from the occidental sea
> to the city founded by Inachus I conveyed the noble herd ...

By calling into play a marketplace god and making him speak in high falutin language, Seneca situates the spirit of his piece squarely in the context of popular humor.

And speaking of the *Aeneid*, Claudius' other great divine foil in the *Apocolocyntosis* is, of course, Augustus. Like Hercules, Augustus (another divinized hero) finds Claudius' body monstrous, and his abuse at 11.3-4 is copious:

> Hunc nunc deum facere vultis? Videte corpus eius dis iratis

[109] Eden (1984: 96), observing that "a specific temple of Hercules seems to be referred to here" suggests this location in part in preference to Bücheler's (1904: 233) emendation of *Tiburi* for *tibi* at 7.4, which he finds "speciously alluring," though Roth (1988: 31) entertains it. Eden supports his choice with a reference to Dio 60.33.8: "Ἰουλίῳ δέ τινι Γαλλίκῳ ῥήτορι δίκην ποτὲ λέγοντι ὁ Κλαύδιος ἀχθεσθεὶς ἐκέλευσεν αὐτὸν ἐς τὸν Τίβεριν ἐμβληθῆναι· ἔτυχε γὰρ πλησίον αὐτοῦ δικάζων" (Claudius, when he became angry at the rhetor Julius Gallicus who was pleading a case one time, ordered him to be thrown into the Tiber; for he happened to be presiding over court near it).

> natum. Ad summam, tria verba cito dicat, et servum me ducat. Hunc deum quis colet? Quis credet? Dum tales deos facitis, nemo vos deos esse credet.
>
> Wow, now you want to make this a god? Look at his body, born when the gods were angry. In sum: let him speak three words quickly, and he can take me away as his slave. Who will worship this as a god? Who will believe? As long as you are making gods like this, nobody will believe you are gods.

Again, along with his inability to speak, Claudius' grotesque body is highlighted. But Augustus' complaints against Claudius dwell more on his murderous reign than on his physical grotesqueness. In this passage and others we are presented with the specter of fear and death that drives the grotesque and which the festive spirit of folk humor in part attempts to resist. The difference here between true popular-folk humor and Seneca's work is that the fear has become politicized: the monster is a real person, the most powerful person in the world until recently. Seneca's appropriation of popular humor and imagery is likewise political. The Neronian grotesque is a response to and rejection of what the Julio-Claudian principate has become. The renewal and rebirth promised by this kind of folk humor and imagery are as political as the fear. A new age is dawning, and it's an age of laughter.

Another key element to popular humor often associated with the grotesque is that of parody (Bakhtin, 1968: 14). The *Apocolocyntosis* features passages throughout that parody history (1), higher poetic diction (2), tragedy (7), etc. But especially important is a parody of official culture--the sanctioned, the powerful, the sacred. By targeting not just Claudius, but the institution of imperial deification (which the work arguably does),[110] the *Apocolocyntosis* takes its place as a piece of

[110] e.g. Duff (1936: 93-94), Weinbrot (2005: 47).

counter-culture popular literature that dares to laugh at what is both, in this case, religiously and politically sacred. Of course, it is easy to read the *Apocolocyntosis* as primarily an ad hominem attack against Claudius,[111] and his apotheosis is certainly a source for laughter in the satire. But it is worth noting that other divinized members of the imperial family are invoked throughout Seneca's work, and none slip by unscathed. At the very beginning of the work, the narrator promises to faithfully narrate the events of last October 13, citing as authority Livius Geminius:

> … qui Drusillam euntem in caelum vidit: idem Claudium vidisse se dicet iter facientem "non passibus aequis." Velit nolit, necesse est illi omnia videre quae in caelo aguntur: Appiae viae curator est, qua scis et divum Augustum et Tiberium Caesarem ad deos isse. (1.2)
>
> The one who saw Drusilla going into heaven: he will say he saw Claudius making the same trip "with unequal steps." Like it or not, it's up to him to see everything that happens in heaven: he's the caretaker of the Appian Way on which you know the divine Augustus and Tiberius Caesar went to the gods.

This passage pokes fun at the institution of the imperial cult as a whole even as it accomplishes its primary task of mocking the deification of Claudius specifically. It does so first by calling to mind the deification of Julia Drusilla under Caligula. In citing this authority and making light of him, the first thing accomplished is a degradation of the deification of Claudius. His deification is associated with a misuse of imperial power by the now disgraced Caligula, his only support being the sycophantic testimony of Geminius. But the fact that Drusilla was divinized calls the institution into question, makes it subjective. Some imperial deifications are

[111] e.g. Currie (1962: 94-95), Coffey (1989: 169): "Seneca was moved by a desire for revenge."

legitimate, others not? The narrator goes on to call Geminius "caretaker of the Appian way, the route by which Augustus and Tiberius joined the gods." There is a double-sting here. First, Tiberius is included among the deified. Officially he was not, and among the people of Rome he was arguably the least popular emperor of the dynasty to date. His inclusion here reflects an indifference to the "official" doctrine of imperial deification--they're all in, good or bad, if you can believe that. But the reference to the Appian Way also carries with it a bit of farce and falls into the same category as several other irreverent jokes about imperial deification. Augustus died at Nola, and Tiberius at Misenum. Both bodies were returned via the Appian Way, so that road leads to heaven simply because it's the one that carried their dead bodies back to Rome for cremation and deification; in a nutshell, dying makes you a god in the imperial cult, nothing more. This joke is along the lines of one of Nero's own *bons mots*, that mushrooms are the food of the gods[112] and other jokes at the expense of imperial divinization, a few of which are recorded by Dio (61.35.2-4); included among them is this very satire:

> ἔτυχε δὲ καὶ τῆς ταφῆς καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσων ὁ Αὔγουστος. Ἀγριππῖνα δὲ καὶ ὁ Νέρων πενθεῖν προσεποιοῦντο ὃν ἀπεκτόνεσαν, ἔς τε τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνήγαγον ὃν ἐκ τοῦ συμποσίου φοράδην ἐξενηνόχεσαν. ὅθενπερ Λούκιος Ἰούνιος Γαλλίων ὁ τοῦ Σενέκα ἀδελφὸς ἀστειότατόν τι ἀπεφθέγξατο. συνέθηκε μὲν γὰρ καὶ ὁ Σενέκας σύγγραμμα, ἀποκολοκύντωσιν αὐτὸ ὥσπερ τινὰ ἀθανάτισιν ὀνομάσας: ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἐν βραχυτάτῳ πολλὰ εἰπὼν ἀπομνημονεύεται. ἐπειδὴ γὰρ

[112] Suetonius *Life of Nero* 33; Suetonius suggests Nero is cleverly quoting a Greek proverb as opposed to Dio (above) who seems to suggest that it was his own original joke. For another such irreverent take on imperial deification, see Suetonius *Life of Vespasian* 28: “prima quoque morbi accessione: “Vae,” inquit, “puto, deus fio;” (as his death first drew near: 'Oh-oh,' he said, 'I think I’m becoming a god').

> τοὺς ἐν τῷ δεσμωτηρίῳ θανατουμένους ἀγκίστροις τισὶ μεγάλοις οἱ δήμιοι ἕς τε τὴν ἀγορὰν ἀνεῖλκον κάντεῦθεν ἐς τὸν ποταμὸν ἕσυρον, ἔφη τὸν Κλαύδιον ἀγκίστρῳ ἐς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνενεχθῆναι. καὶ ὁ Νέρων δὲ οὐκ ἀπάξιον μνήμης ἔπος κατέλιπε: τοὺς γὰρ μύκητας θεῶν βρῶμα ἔλεγεν εἶναι, ὅτι καὶ ἐκεῖνος διὰ τοῦ μύκητος θεὸς ἐγεγόνει
>
> (Claudius) received a burial and other honors just like Augustus. Agrippina and Nero pretended to grieve for the one they had killed: they raised into heaven the one they had carried out of the party on a stretcher. Based on this Lucius Junius Gallio, Seneca's brother, said something very clever (and very frank). Seneca had composed a written piece called *Apocolocyntosis* like a sort of deification: and the brother is remembered for saying a lot very briefly. Since public officials brought men who died in prison to the forum with big hooks and from there dragged them to the river, he said that Claudius had been carried up to heaven on a hook. Nero also left behind a little saying worthy of note: he said that mushrooms were the food of the gods, because Claudius was deified thanks to some mushrooms.

All of these jokes make light of the process of imperial deification: dying is all it takes to be deified, if you are a member of the imperial family. Seneca's work, however, takes the irreverent, "marketplace" type humor and makes it literature. Even Augustus, generally the legitimizer of imperial practice, does not get off lightly as a god. While he does hold a place on Olympus, he is a nobody, a "back bencher" in the divine version of the Senate: "'Ego' inquit 'p.c., vos testes habeo, ex quo deus factus sum, nullum me verbum fecisse: semper meum negotium ago'" ('Conscript Fathers,' he said, 'I have you as my witnesses: ever since I became a god, I have produced not a single word; I always mind my own business') (10.1). His diction, Eden (1984: 115) notes, is a parody of Augustus' own style,[113] both in the official *Res*

[113] See also Athanassakis (1973: 101) and Roth (1988: 37).

Gestae and in his more colloquial moments,[114] and, as indicated above, his abuse of Claudius serves to degrade not just Claudius, but himself as it makes a mockery of the practice of imperial deification. I don't think that the goal here is overtly political in the sense that Seneca is trying to seriously confront the institution of imperial deification. This is political humor with an emphasis on the humor and irreverent license appropriate to a Saturnalian context.

Satura--Saturn--Saturnalia

The *Apocolocyntosis* functions primarily as a Saturnalian inauguration of the return of the Age of Saturn. The satire is the first manifestation of the Neronian grotesque in most of its aspects, including its embrace of the Saturnalia and its spirit. In this early incarnation of the Neronian grotesque, that spirit and that festival are generally deployed, fairly obviously, to suggest that Claudius' reign had been the topsy-turvy reign of the fool, but even in this early work of Neronian satire, there is some flirtation with the later approach to Saturnalia that we have seen in Nero's public persona and that we will see in the later Menippean satire of Petronius.

Saturnalia plays on multiple levels in the *Apocolocyntosis*. In the report of the narrator, the reign of Claudius has been a sort of Saturnalia in and of itself. Claudius' Saturnalian reign is referenced twice explicitly, first at 8.2 and again near the end of the work at 12.2. In this direct referencing of Saturnalia, the holiday is invoked as a time of chaos—the world has been temporarily (though not temporarily enough, according to the unnamed deity at 8.2 who claims it was a year-round event!) stood

[114] For Augustus' fondness for colloquial expressions, see Suetonius *Life of the Deified Augustus,* 87.

on its head, and, at Claudius' death, the proper order of the world is returning. This is represented at 12.2 by the contrasted moods of the *causidici* and the *iuriconsulti.* The *causidici* at Claudius' funeral procession are in mourning—they are the only ones—and Seneca makes his point with unusual subtlety at 12.2: "Agatho et pauci causidici plorabant, sed plane ex animo" (Agatho and a few ambulance chasers were weeping, but clearly from the heart). The choice of *sed* there indicates that all other mourning, by contrast, was not sincere; rather it was ironic and sarcastic. One of the "doctors of law," emerging as if from a coma, approaches them to gloat: "dicebam vobis: non semper Saturnalia erunt" (I kept telling you: it won't be Saturnalia forever). During the time of Saturnalia, the doctors of law have to go into hiding while the ambulance chasers get rich in the courts; the population in general is rejoicing at the end of Saturnalia: Saturnalia represents a world gone mad under the reign of the fool-king. Saturnalia has been an unsettling time.

Some of this notion in the *Apocolocyntosis* may result from the conservative, patrician dread of Saturnalia and its social inversion we meet periodically. Seneca himself speaks disparagingly of the holiday and the *pilleata turba* in *Epistles* 18.1*:*

> December est mensis; cum maxime civitas sudat. Ius luxuriae publicae datum est. Ingenti apparatu sonant omnia, tamquam quicquam inter Saturnalia intersit et dies rerum agendarum. Adeo nihil interest, ut non videatur mihi errasse, qui dixit olim mensem Decembrem fuisse, nunc annum.
>
> It's the month of December, when the city really works up a sweat. Permission is granted to public excess. Everything is humming with tremendous preparation, as though there were some difference between Saturnalia and regular business days. The difference is so not there that I don't think the guy was wrong who

said that back in the day December was a month, now
it's a year.

The echo of the law professor stands out--for a certain type, the license and inversion of Saturnalia seem endless. We also have Pliny the Younger (*Epistles* 2.17.24) seeking refuge from the holiday and his celebrating household. Cicero, in *de Natura Deorum* 3.44, describes Saturn as the god "quem volgo maxime colunt ad occidentem" (the one the common folk in the west worship most). As we have seen, the popular holiday itself (as opposed to the elite's usual dismissal of the festival as little more than a party for the mob) had dark undertones that play very well here with the reign of Claudius as monster as well as fool.

In Saturnalia the full ambivalent power of life growing out of death, of laughter defeating monsters, is present in the dual nature of the god Saturn and in the holiday itself as both festive inversion and topsy-turvy chaos. The fear inspired by Saturn's threatening control over food supply and by the chaos he can create is counter-balanced by the ideas of festive abundance and righteousness depicted during the *Saturnia Regna*, the Italian Golden Age. Vergil most often among Augustan poets tied a return to Saturn's Golden Age to the advent of an important person, first in his fourth *Eclogue*:

…redeunt Saturnia regna;
iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.
tu modo nascenti puero, quo ferrea primum
desinet ac toto surget gens aurea mundo,
casta fave Lucina: tuus iam regnat Apollo.
Eclogues 4. 6-10

The reign of Saturn is returning;
now a new progeny is sent down from lofty heaven.
Chaste Lucina, be with the boy, just now being born;
thanks to him the iron race will come to an end first,

and then a golden one will rise in the whole world.
Your Apollo now reigns.

Later, once the principate was established, the idea of a return to the *Saturnia regna* was tied firmly to the person of the princeps himself:

> hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,
> Augustus Caesar, divi genus, aurea condet
> saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva
> Saturno quondam … *Aeneid* 6. 791-4
>
> There, there is the man whom you hear promised to you so often!
> Augustus Caesar, born of a god, who will establish a Golden Age
> again in Latium throughout the lands ruled
> by Saturn once upon a time …

Julio-Claudian imagery referencing Saturn[115] consistently presents the reign of Saturn as a time of super-abundance—crops produce themselves, food of every sort is plentiful—and a time of perfect, ordered harmony. However, Galinsky (1996: 93-100) points out that this portrayal is not without complication in Augustan literature. While the *Saturnia regna* is still portrayed as a time of abundance and peace, it is not always granted the same status: sometimes it's bad that things are so good. Under Augustus "the Golden Age comes to connote a social order rather than a paradisiac state of indolence" (Galinsky, 1996: 93). In passages from all of Vergil's works,[116] Galinsky shows that a contrasting picture can be found of the *Saturnia regna* as both a time of peaceful abundance and a time of sloth requiring order and law. Vergil uses the *Saturnia regna* in two ways then: it can be used to signify a

[115] Further references in Vergil occur at *Eclogues* 6.41 (just a nod), *Georgics* 2.532-540, and *Aeneid* 1.289-296, 7.199-204, and 8.319-325; Ovid *Amores* 3.8.35-40*; Metamorphosis* 1.89-112*; .* Post-Augustan occurrences, specifically in conjunction with Nero's ascension, occur in both Calpurnius Siculus (cited above) and *Einsiedeln Eclogues* 2, which ends with the last line of Vergil's *Eclogues* 4 cited above.
[116] In addition to the passages noted above, Galinsky looks at *Georgics* 1.121-146, and 2.161-176.

return to better times with the promise of a new ruler or the birth of someone special, but it can also be used as an "allusion to Augustus' social and moral reforms" (Austin, 1977: 244). It is also a literary trope that, by the time of Nero, has become a fairly well-worn commonplace, and there's no surprise when "altera Saturni ... Latialia regna" (a second reign of Saturn in Latium) pops up in Calpurnius Siculus' first *Eclogue*.

Seneca complicates the imagery and refreshes it by deploying imagery of the *Saturnia regna* at the same time with that of the Saturnalia. Operating simultaneously and even side-by-side in the *Apocolocyntosis* with the Golden Age of Saturn is the dark concept from Saturnalia of Saturn as a chthonic, underworld god. He is a god that inspires fear, and his reign is potentially a reign of death for the people. This is why he must be bound. Versnel (1993: 191) sums up nicely the "ambivalence of the Saturnalian dream. One can focus either on the beneficent or on the disquieting aspects of the alternative world and the choice for either one is basically dependent upon one's representation of the alternatives." In the "disquieting" aspect of the god and his holiday we see Claudius functioning as the monster to be feared, the bringer of death and undesirable chaos. Counterbalancing that aspect of Saturn is the traditional Golden Age imagery associated with Nero. In this aspect, Saturn rules as a benign deity during a time of plenty that can extend into extreme freedom and license (though it won't with Seneca). The Golden Age is returning and, since Nero presides over it, Saturn is now Nero.

The idea of the Saturnalian king is treated similarly. Saturnalia, in its undesirable aspects, is presided over by Claudius. This was an era of a world-gone-

wrong, presided over by the most unlikely of fools, physically and mentally unfit for the task. Claudius is identified specifically as the Saturnalian king at 8.2: "Si mehercules a Saturno petisset hoc beneficium, cuius mensem toto anno celebravit, Saturnalicius princeps, non tulisset" (by Herc-you-les[117], if he asked this favor from Saturn, whose month he celebrated all year, that Saturnalicious Emperor, he wouldn't have put up with it). Instead of *Saturnalius rex*, Seneca presents us with *Saturnalicius princeps*: Even the reign of the fool is not quite right! The choice of *princeps* here is pointedly political and grounds the madness in the reality of Claudius' reign. The neologism of *Saturnalicius*[118] (it caught on—v. Martial 5.19.11 and 5.30.8 as examples) compounds the out-of-joint feeling even while it renews the image with a fresh verbal twist. Finally, even though Claudius celebrated Saturn's month all year, the god (in his benign, Golden Age, Olympian aspect) finds Claudius unacceptable.

Seneca's primary take on Saturnalia, as discussed above, is that it is a frightening time. The world is topsy-turvy, and death and fear are prevalent. Yet, like the god Saturn himself, Saturnalia is positive as well as negative. The joyful spirit of Saturnalia is represented in the tone and language of the satire itself, which celebrates the end of a dark time and revels in newfound freedom. The Saturnalian spirit is evident from the beginning at 1.1:

> Quid actum sit in caelo ante diem III idus Octobris anno novo, initio saeculi felicissimi, volo memoriae tradere. Nihil nec offensae nec gratiae dabitur. Haec ita vera. Si quis quaesiverit unde sciam, primum, si noluero, non

[117] Context: Claudius is actually talking to Hercules here, so the invocation seems to be meant to be funny.
[118] *Saturnalicius* here is Bücheler's emendation of the MS. *Saturnalia eius*

> respondebo. Quis coacturus est? Ego scio me liberum factum, ex quo suum diem obiit ille, qui verum proverbium fecerat, aut regem aut fatuum nasci oportere.
>
> What transpired in heaven the third day before the Ides of October in the new year, the beginning of the happiest of times, I want to pass on to be remembered. No thought will be given to offense or favor. If someone should ask how I know these things are true, first, if I don't want to, I won't answer. Who's gonna make me? I know that I became a free man the day he died, the man who had made the proverb true: you should be born a king or an idiot.

This opening sets the tone of the satire with its mockery of official language and genre in the first sentence.[119] Saturnalia specifically is further hinted at with the mention of the "new year." This phrase works very nicely by suggesting the time of year for the actual Saturnalia but also, by locating it in October, by implying the dawn of a new age (reinforced by *initio saeculi felicissimi* immediately after), a reset to the calendar with this epoch-changing transition. Saturnalia is also suggested by the attitude of free speech and the idea of becoming free, since so much of Saturnalia revolves around freedom for slaves and, by extension, others. The author is a sort of freedman now that Claudius is dead. Finally, the mention of king and fool, combined in the person of Claudius (in a popular proverb to boot!) is suggestive of the reign of the *Saturnalius rex* that will be invoked more specifically later in the satire. The language of the opening is the language of a historian, and it is worth noting the joke/surprise of the sudden shift in tone in 1.1 with "primum si noluero, non respondebo" as Weinreich (1923: 17) does: "Bisher hatte der biedere Historiker, ein anderer Tacitus geredet…Die Maske ist abgeworfen, der Buffone steht vor uns, der

[119] Eden (1984: 62) cites Cicero *Verr. sec*. 1.156 as an example of the official and formulaic language being parodied here.

den Leser genasführt. Lächelnd ..." To tell the events of the end of the fool-king's reign, Seneca presents us with a parodic fool-historian who sets the Saturnalian mood from the beginning and promises the continuous inversion and juxtaposing of high and low culture that will be a hallmark of this piece throughout.

Structurally, then, Seneca's work begins and ends with invocations of Saturnalian imagery. Claudius' underworld fate is in every way Saturnalian, not just in its irreverent parody, but in the specifics of his punishments. First, Claudius' punishment, after much deliberation by Aeacus, judge in the Underworld, is to shoot dice in futility for all eternity. There is a double Saturnalian reference going on here. First, the sentence of shooting dice is particularly Saturnalian, since only during the Saturnalia was this activity officially licensed. That dicing is particularly associated with the holiday can be seen in the (admittedly much later) Chronography of 354 (Figure 6), where the illustration shows a large pair of dice as the prominent activity and is captioned in part with the following: "nunc tibi cum domino ludere, verna, licet" (now, slave, you are allowed to play (dice) with your master). The significance of dice also is clear in Martial 11.6:

> Unctis falciferi senis diebus,
> regnator quibus inperat fritillus,
> versu ludere non laborioso
> permittis, puto, pilleata Roma.
> Risisti; licet ergo, non vetamur.
> Pallentes procul hinc abite curae;
> quidquid venerit obvium loquamur
> morosa sine cogitatione.
> Misce dimidios, puer, trientes,
> quales Pythagoras dabat Neroni ...
>
> On the old sickle-carrier's feast days,
> when Lord Dicebox gives the orders,
> You Romans in your freedmen's caps

allow a little casual poetry writing, I think.
Made you smile! It's allowed then, we're not banned.
Gray-faced worries, get outta here:
whatever comes up, let's talk about it
without gloomy thinking.
Mix some strong drinks, boy,
just like the ones Dindymus gave Nero …

Here in Martial we have the same *fritillus* that is the instrument of Claudius' torture. The joke-punishment is clearly Claudius-specific—he was well known for his dicing—but it is also Saturnalian and, if "Lord Dicebox" is as proverbial as it sounds for a *Saturnalius rex*, we have a much richer joke that re-identifies Claudius as the *Saturnalicius princeps*, hard on the heels of the law professor's pronouncement that the Saturnalia is (finally) over. But in that passage we also get a further extension of the idea of the Saturnalia in Aeacus. In 14.4 we are told that Aeacus' goal for the punishment is to provide Claudius with "laborem irritum et alicuius cupiditatis speciem[120] effectu" (a task futile and with the appearance of something he wanted without accomplishing it). As a Saturnalian parallel, we have Nero in the role of *Saturnalius rex* in AD 54—possibly the occasion for this satire, as will be seen—doing something quite similar to Claudius' son Britannicus:

festis Saturno diebus inter alia aequalium ludicra
regnum lusu sortientium evenerat ea sors Neroni.
igitur ceteris diversa nec ruborem adlatura: ubi
Britannico iussit exsurgeret progressusque in medium
cantum aliquem inciperet, inrisum ex eo sperans pueri
sobrios quoque convictus, nedum temulentos
ignorantis, ille constanter exorsus est carmen…
Tacitus, *Annals* 13.15

[120] The Teubner edition has *spe<cie>m*; commentators are divided: Ball (1902) and Eden (1984) for instance agree on *spem* as the correct reading. Bücheler (1904) retains *speciem*, as does Rouse (1987: 480), who comments that *spem* is part of an "inferior tradition."

> During the festival of Saturn among his peers' other games while they were rolling the dice for a ruler that roll came out in favor of Nero. So for the others he ordered various things that wouldn't cause embarrassment; when he ordered Britannicus to get up, step forward into the middle of the group, and start a song, hoping for mockery of the boy who was inexperienced even with sober, much less drunk socializing, he started a song without hesitating ...

Here we have Nero himself functioning as Saturnalian king in 54 A.D. Part of his job in this role is, apparently, to assign tasks that amuse the others who are watching. There was apparently a wide latitude for how much "fun" the *Saturnalius rex* wished to have, so in this case Nero assigns his friends ones that won't make them blush (with some implication that a S*aturnalius rex* could opt for this if he chose) but to Britannicus he assigns a task at which the princeps hopes he will fail and be made to look ridiculous. In some respects this is similar to the role Aeacus plays at the end of *Apocolocyntosis;* thus we have the spirit of the Saturnalia and its *rex* echoed in multiple characters and tasks at the very end of the satire.

The Saturnalian spirit of this satire may in fact be a direct result of the occasion of its composition. The idea that the *Apocolocyntosis* was written specifically for the Saturnalia of 54 A.D. has been around at least long enough for Furneaux (1896: 171) to suggest it in his addition of Tacitus' *Annals*[121] and has continued to be mentioned since,[122] most thoroughly by R.R. Nauta (1987). Nauta initially suggests that the "function" of the *Apocolocyntosis* is admonitory: Seneca provides Nero with a negative to good governance that complements his inaugural

[121] Eden (1984: 5) cites him as source for the idea, which he calls "attractive."
[122] For mention of the idea see Griffin (1976: 129, n. 3) and (1984: 96-7); Goodyear (1982: 634); Russo (1982: 548-549) mentions it to dismiss it, and his earlier commentary (1964) doesn't bring it up.

speech for Nero (paraphrased in Tacitus) and his *de Clementia*. Possibly. But Nauta goes on to suggest some interesting other functions of the satire specifically in the context of its (theoretically) being an occasional piece for the Saturnalia in 54 A.D. Noting the "safety valve" effect of Saturnalia and carnival-type festivals in general, he suggests that the *Apocolocyntosis* could in fact perform this function for members of the court. There is an important distinction here to be emphasized between my definition of the Neronian grotesque and other manifestations of the grotesque. The Neronian grotesque operates on some levels as an elite sort of in-joke. The popular elements are not necessarily populist, but rather a literary choice. Seneca's jokes, Seneca's safety valve, Seneca's satire are for a select group: the group that had lived close to the specter of Claudius' capricious rule, close enough to feel the fear. Thus the satire at the Saturnalia gives them license to laugh, as noted earlier. Nauta (1987: 94) also suggests that Saturnalia and carnival in general are times for "the testing of new values in a playful setting." Here Nauta is somewhat vague, asserting the novelty of Neronian rule in contrast to Claudius' before returning to his idea that the *Apocolocyntosis* functions as a kind of complement to his *de Clementia* and that his notions of good governance, versus Claudius' bad ones, are the "new values" being given their test run.

So Nauta would have the *Apocolocyntosis* serve a primarily didactic function, with an audience primarily of one and with Seneca in his usual role as tutor to the young emperor. Ultimately, though, are these values being tested really "new?" Certainly Nero's accession after Claudius mirrored in tone Gaius' after Tiberius, and what Julio-Claudian emperor had not at some point hearkened back to Augustanism

in one way or another? Rather, I would suggest that the "new values" being tried out at this early point in the reign are in fact the ones that informed Nero's new approach to the arts and to self-representation. Moreover, they are being presented at the Saturnalia in the form of satire because that occasion and that venue are both ideally suited to the new values of Neronian expression that will flower throughout his reign as the Neronian grotesque.

The *Apocolocyntosis* as an Expression of the Neronian Grotesque: Political and Literary Renewal

In traditional festive imagery, the specter of fear is present as death, famine, want, and chthonic, underworld gods. This specter of fear in the hands of an artist may be used to symbolize the oppressions of official culture, as Bakhtin (1968: 99) suggests is happening in the work of Renaissance writers like Cervantes and especially Rabelais:

> All popular-festive images were made to serve this new historical awareness ... This was a mobilization of all the century-old celebrations: the gay farewell to winter, to Lent, to the old year, to death ... In a word, it was the mustering of all the long-matured images of change and renewal, of growth and abundance.
>
> These images saturated with time and the utopian future, reflecting the people's hopes and strivings, now became the expression of the general gay funeral of a dying era, of the old power and old truth.

But in the counter-cultural stance taken at the beginning of the reign of Nero, official culture—the Julio-Claudian principate (with emphasis on the Claudian)—itself is monstrous, something to be feared. The reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius had seen a tremendous amount of bloodshed after the relatively peaceful

last few decades of Augustus' reign.[123] In Augustus' speech against admitting Claudius into the rank of gods, Gaius (Caligula) and Claudius himself are indicted at 11.1 as murderers of the *nobiles* and of the imperial family in particular:

> Tu Messalinam, cuius aeque avunculus maior eram
> quam tuus, occidisti. 'Nescio' inquis? Di tibi male
> faciant: adeo istuc turpius est, quod nescisti, quam quod
> occidisti. C. Caesarem non desiit mortuum persequi.
> Occiderat ille socerum: hic et generum. Gaius Crassi
> filium vetuit Magnum vocari: hic nomen illi reddidit,
> caput tulit. Occidit in una domo Crassum, Magnum,
> Scriboniam …
>
> You killed Messalina—I was her great-great-uncle as
> much as yours. "I don't know," you say? Damn you! It's
> even worse that you didn't know than that you killed.
> He didn't stop chasing after Gaius Caesar when he was
> dead. Gaius had killed his father-in-law; this guy killed a
> son-in-law too. Gaius wouldn't let Crassus' son be called
> "the Great;" This guy gave him back his name, took his
> head. He killed in one house Crassus, Magnus,
> Scribonia …

By presenting them, particularly Claudius, in this way, Seneca makes the folk humor political: Claudius (and the degenerate principate which he represents) is the monster that is to be mocked in death and transformed into comical, fertile corpse out of which will spring new life, a rebirth, in this case, of the principate in the person of Nero--a principate made new:

> Phoebus ait "vincat mortalis tempora vitae
> ille mihi similis vultu similisque decore
> nec cantu nec voce minor. Felicia lassis

[123] This was an important impression in Rome: included in the list of ways in which Nero modeled his reign on that of Augustus in the beginning is this anecdote (Suetonius, *Life of Nero* 10.2): "Et cum de supplicio cuiusdam capite damnati ut ex more subscriberet admoneretur: 'Quam vellem,' inquit, 'nescire litteras.'" (and when according to custom he was reminded to sign off on the execution of a man condemned to death, he said, "How I wish I didn't know how to write.") This is specifically listed as an example of direct emulation of Augustus.

saecula praestabit legumque silentia rumpet.
Qualis discutiens fugientia Lucifer astra
aut qualis surgit redeuntibus Hesperus astris,
qualis, cum primum tenebris Aurora solutis
induxit rubicunda diem, Sol aspicit orbem
lucidus et primos a carcere concitat axes:
talis Caesar adest, talem iam Roma Neronem
aspiciet. Flagrat nitidus fulgore remisso
vultus et adfuso cervix formosa capillo." (4.1.21-32)

Phoebus said, "Let him surpass mortals' lifespan
like me in looks and like me in beauty
no less in song or voice. Happy times for the weary
he will bring about, and he will break the silence of
the laws. Just as the Bearer of Light, scattering fleeing
stars, or just as the Evening Star rises with the stars
returning, just as when rosy Dawn has brought the morning,
shadows dispersed, the shining Sun looks upon the world
and he spurs on his wheels first from the starting gate:
such a Caesar is here, now Rome will gaze upon such a
Nero. His gleaming face burns with gentle blaze,
and his shoulder with flowing hair.

In this verse passage, Nero is described by Apollo as Apollo. Just as Hercules and Augustus make a case against Claudius and serve as foils to contrast with him physically and imperially, Apollo is chosen here not just as a god of prophecy. As one of the most physically beautiful gods, Apollo compares Nero directly to himself in the two physical terms used to condemn Claudius, appearance and speech. Apollo hails Nero as *similis mihi* both in physical beauty and in voice. This sets Nero in direct contrast to Claudius and legitimizes him as a proper princeps returning to the Augustan model of divine perfection. The repeated imagery of a new day dawning through the names of various luminous deities—Lucifer, Aurora, Sol—followed by the name of Caesar, make Nero essentially a new rising of the original principate, the one corrupted, monstrous, and, in death, ridiculous. This highly crafted poetic praise is followed immediately by Claudius' cacatious earthly end.

The monster is no longer to be feared thanks to the laughter that is born at the same time as the new dawning of the principate.

Or perhaps that should be "the dawning of the new principate" instead. For this golden, light-drenched proclamation of the new age is saturated in Menippean satirical parody. Here Seneca is perhaps initiating the dialogue that Neronian grotesque satire will engage in with post-Augustan literature as well. The rebirth of the principate will be the rebirth of literature too, but neither will look like the Augustan model. Critics have noted that Seneca's hexameters seem curiously unimpressive here. As Eden (1984: 75) says, "their facile elisionless flow presents expected images in formalized word-patterns with insipid blandness…the author makes his point by holding a mirror up to uninventive mediocrity." This passage reads as typical of what "high" verse has become since the Augustan literary revolution: smoothed out, formal, and empty. Artfulness has replaced art. Perhaps, though, it is even more reminiscent of the bucolic tradition, originating with Vergil, of pronouncements of a Golden Age. Either way, the problem with this kind of verse is that it has been done since Vergil, since Ovid, with the principal innovation being a continuation of Horace and Ovid's smoothing out and perfecting the flow of verse.[124] Arriving at the time of Nero, that poetry lacks sinew, is all smoothness, and is completely predictable. Compare Seneca's lines above to Calpurnius Siculus'[125] bucolic verses:

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[124] See, for example, Horace's well known programmatic statements in his satires, particularly 1.10.50-64 and in his *Ars Poetica*, e.g. 258-274.

[125] Calpurnius Siculus' work has been traditionally dated to Nero's early reign since the late nineteenth century. Edward Champlin (1978) has suggested instead assigning him to the reign of Alexander Severus. Some have accepted this idea, but

Amyntas: Di, precor, hunc iuvenem, quem vos (neque fallor) ab ipso
aethere misistis, post longa reducite vitae
tempora vel potius mortale resolvite pensum
et date perpetuo caelestia fila metallo:
sit deus et nolit pensare palatia caelo!

Corydon: tu quoque mutata seu Iuppiter ipse figura,
Caesar, ades seu quis superum sub imagine falsa
mortalique lates (es enim deus): hunc, precor, orbem,
hos, precor, aeternus populos rege! sit tibi caeli
vilis amor coeptamque, pater, ne desere pacem! (4.137-146)

Amyntas: Gods, I pray, this young man, whom you (I am not mistaken)
sent from heaven itself, after a long life take back
or instead unwind his mortal skein
and grant him heavenly thread in everlasting metal:
let him be a god and not wish to exchange his palace for heaven.

Corydon: You too, whether you are here as Jupiter himself here with visage changed,
Caesar, or, one of those on high, you hide under false and mortal
appearance (you are, indeed, a god): this world, I pray,
these peoples, I pray, rule forever! Let love of heaven be nothing
to you and, father, desert not the peace you've begun!

This is what the Augustan style has become over the decades; Cizek (1972: 373-8) notes Calpurnius' adherence to classicism and to Augustan poets like Vergil, Horace, and Ovid and concludes "Calpurnius Siculus engagea implicitement une polémique contre le nouveau mouvement littéraire en brandissant la bannière de l'art d'obédiance classique." In addition to the echoing prayers for long life and the assertion of divinity, the image of Nero's life being measured out in threads of gold are echoed in Seneca earlier in this passage at lines 7-8: "Mirantur pensa sorores:/mutatur vilis pretioso lana metallo" (the sisters marvel at the skeins: wool worth nothing is changed to precious metal). As close as these passages may seem

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the Neronian date still prevails (without being absolute). For a direct refutation of Champlin, see Townend (1980). Weighing in on Champlin's side and with a good running commentary on the various players is Baldwin (1995a).

to be, it is unlikely that Seneca is imitating Calpurnius Siculus specifically here. Rather, Calpurnius is a surviving example of the type of backward-looking poetry that was commonplace at this time. Seneca's point is directed at the prevailing style of the time, not at Calpurnius Siculus, who probably wrote his poem a little later.

The jab at recent Augustan-era imitators is more pointed because Seneca has already quoted Vergil's poetry directly in the previous chapter. As Claudius lies there (not) dying, Mercury intervenes with the fates, ending his plea at 3.2 with the line "Dede neci, melior vacua sine regnet in aula" (put him to death, and let his better rule in his empty court). This is a quote from *Georgics* 4.90, discussing rival bee kings. Of course, as Athanassakis (1973: 12-14) points out, the better and worse bee kings work as parallels for Claudius and Nero. However, we are also faced with a literary comparison of three different styles: the quote of Vergil's famous passage is enough to conjure the work, I would argue, and to set it in dialogue with Seneca's parodic version of contemporary, overly refined, watered-down Vergilian style poetry. Athanassakis (1973: 26-27) as well as Braund and James (1998: 293-295) want to take Seneca's lines about Nero at face value as praise, ignoring their relatively poor quality.[126] They make the comparison to Calpurnius as well, but do so to point out the similarities as evidence of a standard portrayal of a beautiful emperor as naturally fit to rule. However, given the fact that, as Eden notes, the lines seem intentionally weak, I believe that the point here is not primarily praise of

[126] Athanassakis (1973: 25) notes the contrasting styles of the passages, but feels that the encomiastic verses' "primary function is to praise Nero in a language which was well established." This statement, I believe, ignores context, ignores the (arguably) intentionally poor quality of the verse, and ignores the Saturnalian context in which the satire is likely presented.

Nero in a traditional sense but a rather sharp contrast in artistic styles. Vergil is quoted to conjure a contrast between his achievement and what the imitators of that achievement sound like now. Seneca then pivots and gives us another contrast, following his mock grandiloquence with the new grotesque style that will continue to be a part of the Neronian aesthetic. The big difference between the two styles here is that nobody takes a shit after the grand eulogizing in Calpurnius Siculus.

The juxtaposition of "grand" verse with the oh-so-earthy demise of the emperor is more than just ironic contrast, more than a cruel joke at the expense of the dead *princeps*, and more than just a grotesque expression of political renewal. This is the moment of Claudius' *apocolocyntosis*: he collapses into a pile of mush, but it is a pile of fertile mush out of which something new is produced. In the moment he "burbles out" his life and shits himself, we see the demise of the old, the flaccid, the mushy in favor of something new and vibrant. That stark contrast between the verse passage heralding a return to a golden age and Claudius' death by scatology is yet another rebirth: Seneca's adoption of popular images and language is the promise of a new kind of literature, one that is grotesque, comic, and refreshed by drawing on an entirely different set of images and language. Politically, the monster Claudius is dead, and mocked in death. Literarily, the same moment signals the end of traditional Julio-Claudian style refinement as the "official" voice of literature and indicates a new one, revivified through vulgar language and popular imagery.

So, when Diespiter, already debased at 9.4 as *nummulariolus* (a small-change moneylender) concludes his case in favor of Claudius' divine status at 9.5, the joke operates on multiple levels:

> sitque e re publica esse aliquem qui cum Romulo possit "ferventia rapa vorare," censeo uti divus Claudius ex hac die deus sit, ita uti ante eum qui optimo iure factus sit, eamque rem ad Metamorphosis Ovidi adiciendam.
>
> and since it's in the public interest that there be someone who can "munch boiled turnips" with Romulus, I move that the godlike Claudius be a god from this day on, in full status just like any who became one before him, and that this matter be added to Ovid's *Metamorphosis*.

There is the tongue-in-cheek laughter at the expense of official culture's process of deification, undercut by the need for a low-budget snack buddy for Romulus. The Romulus line is possibly a quote from Lucilius, which brings in a peppering of satire to this mock solemn moment in apposition to Ovid's most ambitious bid for imperial favor. People turned into gods are a joke, going back to the beginning. But the specific reference to Ovid's *Metamorphosis* is pointed as well. The kind of literary deification begun by Vergil and taken literally in Ovid is contrasted with the satire itself: Claudius' "transformation into a go(ur)d" is the Neronian grotesque's answer to the "metamorphoses" of Julius Caesar and of Augustus in Ovid.

One of the most powerful aspects of this joke/programmatic declaration is that Nero is clearly in on it. This is a piece of literature almost certainly written by Nero's closest advisor at the beginning of his reign. The piece was written with Nero as the number-one member of the audience, and possibly, given Nero's own interest in the arts and his subsequent grotesque program, with Nero in consultation. It is a new kind of literature not necessarily because it is new in and of itself: Menippean satire existed before this; popular imagery and vulgarism in literature did too. The freshness stems from the fact that this kind of voice is now

being deployed as the voice of official culture, the first of multiple pieces from the imperial circle to do so. Griffin (1976: 131) rightly sees laughter as the dominant spirit of the work, but I think she errs when she claims "nothing here is sacred--except Nero." I would argue that, with Saturnalian license, Seneca's humor includes the young emperor as well, and that the young emperor was in the know. "The emperor has no clothes!" a voice from the crowd shouts, but the new emperor continues the parade naked and laughing: he is official culture espousing laughter at the expense of official culture.

First and foremost, Nero is interested in a reinvigoration of the arts in general and of literature in particular, principally through the adoption of popular language and imagery. In this respect, the greater license of the Saturnalia and its popular roots both allow the testing of this new mode of expression and provide it with an appropriate context. Satire, self-described as a "low" form of literature and one known for its *libertas*, likewise is the logical starting place in literature for this new aesthetic. The holiday of Saturnalia too is of course noted for its inversion of social norms and class, but there is much of hybridity in the holiday as well in terms of the duality of fear and joy concentrated in the figure of Saturn and all of its curious incongruities (see above). Hybridity, duality, ambivalence are of course features of the grotesque in most of its manifestations, and are particularly built-in as a given to a literary form that combines multiple modes of expression and juxtaposes language and genre in such incongruous ways.

This more tightly bound ambivalence innate to Saturnian imagery and to Saturnalia would have allowed Nero to exploit this imagery to useful ends when

constructing an aesthetic for his reign. This is because the "reign of the fool" is simultaneously undesirable in its disintegration of moral standards, its disruption of society, its threat of revolution (Claudius' reign) and desirable in its euphoric abandon, its (over-)abundance, its leveling of strata (Nero's). The reign of the *Saturnalius rex* is good and bad, occurring at a key moment of change in cosmic history.

That key moment in cosmic history for Nero and his crew is the moment highlighted in this satire, the death of Claudius and the ascension of Nero. This was to be a revolution from within: Nero was the heir apparent and had the bloodline; logically he represented a continuity of "official culture." Yet Nero, particularly being so young, clearly had a counter-cultural streak in him, even if it is only the rebellion of the privileged heir apparent. The revolution for Nero is the rejection of the core values of the Julio-Claudian aesthetic, established during the reign of Augustus and then worked to death by imitators for generations. The long winter for Nero and his troupe is the long, slow, process of waiting for the Julio-Claudian aesthetic to die, to be replaced by something new, the Neronian grotesque. The inaugural piece of literature of the new reign was a "low" Menippean satire, hybrid, chock full of vulgarity and low imagery. It is a Saturnalian literary revolution: the lowest of genres takes pride of place.

This political and artistic dynamic is played out on a co(s)mic scale as we follow Claudius on his journey. Not too seriously, Seneca paints a picture of the reign of the new emperor as something that will be very different, and the distinction is drawn by relegating Augustus, his Claudian successors, and Nero to

three different planes of existence. After Claudius' defecation/deification, he makes the journey to heaven. It's worth noting that the gods are almost ready to grant Claudius status as one of their own (9.5-9.6) until Augustus speaks for the first time ever. Augustus, the first and the model, effectively closes heaven (the god Janus has suggested this earlier, but the gods are then swayed by the smarmy Diespiter). As a representative of the classical, Julio-Claudian ideal, he denies future entry to that plane on which the ideal exists--the divine. Claudius, as a representative of the decayed, degenerate principate (and its artistic accompaniment) is instead banished to the underworld. There, we find that things aren't really that different from life for Claudius. He pursues gambling and ends up under Caligula's thumb briefly before working for a freedman as a clerk, pretty much what his life was like before he died. The Claudian world that followed Augustus is now dead and buried. That leaves Nero ruling on earth, and what's happening there? A funeral has literally erupted into a party. The dirge that accompanies Claudius' funeral procession, as Athanassakis (1973: 38) notes, "is sung in a light anapestic meter suitable for a festive occasion." Even as Saturnalia--in the form of topsy-turvy misrule--ends, Saturnalia as festival of rebirth begins, growing out of the burial of the decayed past.

We have already seen that Nero celebrated the Saturnalia in 54. Tacitus (*Annals* 13.15) tells us he celebrated the festival, at least the party where he served as *Saturnalius re*x, with “his peers” (*aequalium*). It seems likely that this would, at least in part, be an audience for Seneca’s satire. The group clearly had some interest in literary endeavors, since the shape of Nero’s commands as *Saturnalius rex* were at least in part literary, such as his Saturnalian joke on Britannicus.

Whether or not this group was an early form of the literary circle Tacitus (*Annals* 14.16) tells us Nero formed later, there is certainly literary influence flowing both ways between Nero and Seneca, and this piece seems an early manifestation of the Neronian grotesque that would be more fully explored in Menippean satire by Petronius, whenever he may have joined that circle (though it is not impossible that he was there from the beginning, since he had risen under Nero to the consulship by 60 A.D.), and in verse satire by Persius, who associated with the Neronian circle even if he remained on its fringe. Given Seneca's attitude towards Saturnalia in his epistle and the generally negative view of the holiday itself he seems to espouse in the *Apocolocyntosis*, it is reasonable to assume that Nero is the prime mover in terms of exploring Saturnalia as a mode of expression. He enjoyed the holiday, we have seen, and the license and the popular "slumming it" are part of his behavior throughout his reign. Whether or not Seneca really embraced the popular, Saturnalian spirit, and whether he intended his work to take wing and to set the aesthetic tone for Nero's reign or not, it did. The *Apocolocyntosis* was a success with Nero and, by extension, the literary circle at court.

Chapter 3: Horace's Grotesque Corpus and Persius' Satires

What to make of Persius and his satires? Traditionally, Persius is looked at as an outsider, a "bookish" intellectual who stayed away from Rome's politics in favor of literary and philosophical pursuits:[127] "the poems of Persius, some scholars are quick to remind us, look the way they look because they were produced under Nero ... truncated, veiled, and safely 'philosophical'. This is the new look of non-

[127] e.g. Anderson (1961: 10-14); Dessen (1968: 5); Coffey (1976: 99-100); Harvey (1981: 1-2).

suicidal satire under a tyrant, poems that turn inside ..." (Freudenberg, 2001: 125). This story usually includes mention of his Stoicism, for how could a Stoic endure the excesses of Neronian culture and Nero himself? And thence we return to the idea that Neronian era satire is "satirizing" Nero in some way. However, this reading of the man and his work presents challenges in interpretation that are extremely difficult to address. Persius' poems and language are typically described as unpleasant: the "crabbedness" of the writing, how "harsh" it is to read and its "uglifying" of language and of Rome itself;[128] this style is generally attributed to idiosyncrasy, though Harvey (1981: 3-5) sees a moralizing facet in its rejection of Horace's smoothness and "non-committal attitude" and Freudenberg (2001: 127ff) sees Persius' ugliness as a political endeavor, an attempt to construct an image of the tyrant Nero. Then there are Persius' consistent allusions to Horace, observed and documented as early as Casaubon (1695: 203-214), who provides a complete list under the heading *Persiana Horatii Imitatio*, and further detailed more recently by Hooley (1997). Persius' bookishness is at work here[129] or, more recently, his desire to criticize the Rome of his day through allusion (Hooley, 2007: 92).

[128] Sullivan (1985: 111), Harvey (1981: 5), Hooley (2007: 110) respectively.
[129] Conington (1893: xxxii-xxxiii): "He followed prodigally an example which had been set sparingly, not knowing or not remembering that satire is a kind of composition which of all others is kept alive not by antiquarian associations, but by contemporary interest ... We can hardly doubt that a wider worldly knowledge would have led him to correct his error of judgment."

In addition to the hardwired assumptions established around Nero[130] and around satire,[131] much of the traditional take on Persius comes from the Suetonian biography:

> Sed mox ut a schola magistrisque devertit, lecto Lucili libro decimo vehementer saturas componere studuit. Cuius libri principium imitatus est sibi primo, mox omnibus detrectaturus cum tanta recentium poetarum et oratorum insectatione, ut etiam Neronem principem illius temporis inculpaverit. Cuius versus in Neronem cum ita se haberet "auriculas asini Mida rex habet," in eum modum a Cornuto ipso tantum nomine mutato est emendatus "auriculas asini quis non habet?" ne hoc in se Nero dictum arbitraretur.
>
> But as soon as he left the classroom and his teachers, he passionately pursued composing satires after he read the tenth book of Lucilius. He imitated the beginning of this book at first to bring himself down a peg, and soon everyone else, with such a total attack on contemporary poets and orators that he even criticized Nero, emperor at that time. His verse against Nero went like this: "King Midas has ass' ears;" it was rewritten by Cornutus himself in the same meter with only the name changed: "Who does not have ass' ears?" so Nero wouldn't think this phrase was against him.

There are, of course, plenty of problems with taking this biographical introduction attached to Persius' book completely at face value. Witke (1984: 802) sums up the usual procedure:

> Studies of Persius have generally followed the following pattern: the six satires and their choliambic prologue are placed against the larger paradigm of Neronian Rome ; those elements of the Vita Persii which mention Persius' attacks on the emperor being suppressed by Cornutus his mentor are duly brought forward with perhaps misplaced emphasis, and a set of arguments, as predictable as they are jejune, is marshaled.

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[130] Freudenberg (2001: 125) speaks of "our Neronian imaginations configured by the tales of the moralizing historians Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio ..."
[131] e.g. Hooley (2007: 89): "Persius' interest in the state of Rome is obvious in the satires. Persius saw Rome as ripe for satire ...."

Authorship of the *Vita* is uncertain: Anderson (1961: 7) accepts the biography as written within thirty years of the poet's death by Valerius Probus and deems it "authoritative." On the other hand, Paratore (1968) attempts to discredit the attribution to Probus and considers the work as legitimately Suetonian.[132] More recently Hooley (2007: 88) uses the biography to construct a picture of the poet and even of his motivations, but acknowledges that "these later-composed biographical 'Lives' are nearly always to a degree fictive." With so little else to work with, it's difficult to ignore the *Vita*, but Hooley's caution is important to keep in mind even when ignoring it. As an introduction to Persius' book of Neronian era satires, the assumptions about Nero and satire are already in place and deployed to try to make sense of the book. Leaving aside the biographer's interpretation of poems as interpretation of motive, the events described paint a picture of a young poet writing early in the reign of Nero with connections to Nero's court. According to the biography, he died at age 28 in 62 AD; he began writing as soon as he had finished school and wrote only sporadically and slowly. This puts him writing during Nero's first five years, at least in part--a time when the drive to "satirize" the young emperor wouldn't have been a likely motivation. The biography also connects Persius to members of Nero's literary circle, both Seneca and Lucan, and even suggests a public reading of Persius' poetry among them.[133] These multiple

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[132] "La Vita di Persio" in *Biografia e Poetica di Persio*, 1-55. Kenney (1969: 171) finds Paratore's rejection of Probus as author convincing, but notes that his attribution to Suetonius is "far from watertight." Witke (1984: 810-811) agrees that attribution of the *Vita* to Probus is false and suggests a "Suetonian core" with later interpolations.

[133] "Sero cognovit et Senecam, sed non ut caperetur eius ingenio" (later he got to know Seneca too, but wasn't taken with his talent). "Lucanus mirabatur adeo

connections and interactions with key literary figures of the day, as Korfmacher (1933: 277) notes, "put the poet in touch with contemporary conditions in the field of letters and with such movements and controversies as stirred the literary life of his day." That makes more sense than the "outsider" profile critics like Hooley have suggested, and I would suggest that the "movements and controversies" included a conflict of styles between the status quo, derivative, post-Augustan style and the Neronian grotesque.

Whether or not Persius was truly inspired by Lucilius to write satire, the satirist and poet with whom Persius most often engages is Horace. In this engagement with an Augustan predecessor and in the palette of imagery and language Persius paints from, the satirist in fact shows himself to be part of the Neronian literary program. This need not mean he was in Nero's literary stable (like Seneca and his friend Lucan) and a supporter of the emperor, but the fact that Persius adopts an aesthetic--a grotesque style--similar to that of writers at court like Seneca and Petronius should call into question the traditional reading of his poems as anti-Neronian as well as the understanding of his motivations (to satirize Nero's Rome).

The Neronian grotesque, having assumed a pole opposite to the Augustan ideal, promises a rebirth of language, literature, and art, all of which have stagnated

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scripta Flacci, ut vix se retineret recitante eo de more quin illa esse vera poemata, sua ludos diceret" (Lucan admired Persius' writing so much that, while he was reciting, as was the custom, he could scarcely contain himself from saying that they were real poems, and his own just messing around).

through decades of aping the Augustan prototypes. Persius' engagement with Horace thoroughly executes this aspect of Nero's artistic program. Like Seneca in the *Apocolocyntosis*, Persius takes on the wheezing, derivative poetry that has been the tradition since the literary revolution of Augustus became monumentalized. His quotations and parodies of such verse in Satire 1, juxtaposed with his own very different language, make the same point that Seneca made when he juxtaposed the "Golden Age of Nero" verses with Claudius' shitty end. But Persius takes the project a step further: by constantly echoing, quoting, re(as)sembling Horace, Persius rejuvenates the genre associated with and exhausted by him,[134] giving it new life. The imitation of Horace, the extension of his refinement in particular, has left poetry enervated; I argue that Persius grotesques Horace and, in doing so, gives us the most perfect realization of the Neronian literary program to challenge and emulate the Augustan achievement.

Horace describes good writing through the metaphors of painting and sculpting on several occasions. In the *Ars Poetic*a, Horace begins his "how to" manual with a comparison of composition to the choices of a painter:

> Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam
> iungere si velit, et varias inducere plumas
> Undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum
> desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne,
> spectatum admissi risum teneatis, amici?
> Credite, Pisones, isti tabulae fore librum
> persimilem, cuius, velut aegri somnia, vanae
> fingentur species, ut nec pes nec caput uni
> reddatur formae. "Pictoribus atque poetis
> quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas."
> Scimus.... (1-11)

[134] Coffey (1976: 99): "[Horace's] many-sided achievement must have seemed to offer an almost unattainable standard ...."

> If a painter should want to join a horse's neck
> to a human head, and to add different types of feathers
> to limbs gathered from all over, so that a
> beautiful woman on top ends ugly in a black fish,
> would you hold back the laughs at a viewing, friends?
> Trust me, Pisos, those awful paintings would be just like
> a book whose images are constructed foolishly,
> like the dreams of a sick man, so that you can't put head or foot
> to a single shape. "Painters and poets have always had
> the same ability to try anything." I know.

Horace's imagined paintings here are meant to illustrate incongruities, a lack of unity (*uni formae*). They are, in several respects, grotesque images, in that they are surprising images built of unexpected juxtapositions. Horace's paintings here are like mythological hybrid beasts, but they also are a slightly exaggerated version of the real paintings decried by Vitruvius. Horace, the most consistent and elaborate descriptor of the Augustan literary aesthetic, is as specifically opposed to grotesque principles as Vitruvius is as descriptor of the Augustan ideal in the visual arts. Another of Horace's favorite metaphors for poetry is sculpture. Later in the introduction to the *Ars Poetica* (32-37) he describes a frustrated sculptor who can't quite get everything perfect; he concludes that living like that would be like living with an ugly face:

> Aemilium circa ludum faber imus et unguis
> exprimet et mollis imitabitur aere capillos,
> infelix operis summa, quia ponere totum
> nesciet. hunc ego me, si quid componere curem,
> non magis esse velim, quam naso vivere pravo,
> spectandum nigris oculis nigroque capillo.
>
> Around the Aemilian school a craftsman, low man on the ladder,
> sculpts fingernails and replicates soft hair in bronze,
> but he's unhappy with the results of the work, because
> he doesn't know how to put the whole thing together.
> I wouldn't want to be this guy, if I wanted to create something,

any more than I'd want to live with a crooked nose,
something to be gawked at with my black eyes and black hair.

Later in the *Ars Poetica* (291-294), Horace returns to the sculptural metaphor:

…vos, o
Pompilius sanguis, carmen reprehendite quod non
multa dies et multa litura coercuit atque
praesectum deciens non castigavit ad unguem.

You, who
trace your line back to Pompilius, fault a poem which
many a day and many an eraser hasn't kept under control
and critiqued ten times over to get ready for the test of a short nail.

It is clear that Horace saw a connection between the visual and the literary arts, and Nero did too. Tacitus (*Annals* 13.3) and Suetonius (*Life of Nero* 52), both say that, in addition to Nero's interest in poetry, he was also attracted to painting and sculpture. Persius picks up on this metaphor, and here we see a very clear programmatic engagement with Horace as representative of the Augustan aesthetic. In Satire 1 (61-65), Persius, while engaged in a debate about contemporary poetry, has the following:

Vos, o patricius sanguis, quos vivere fas est
occipiti caeco, posticae occurrite sannae.
Quis populi sermo est? Quis enim nisi carmina molli
nunc demum numero fluere, ut per leve severos
effundat iunctura unguis. (Satire 1, 61-65)

Blue bloods--it's right that you don't have
eyes in the back of your head--face the sneering behind.
What does popular opinion say? What do you think? That
poetry now at last flows with smooth rhythm, so that critical
fingernails glide smoothly over the joints.

The test of the nail on sculpture is the same as that in Horace, but *patricius sanguis* in line 61 so strongly echoes *Pompilius sanguis* in *Ars Poetica* 291 that Persius must

be doing more than echoing a metaphor.[135] More than any other Augustan-era poet, Horace states the literary program of the Augustan style and aesthetic. Persius' near-quote here puts him directly in dialogue with Horace and Horace's stylistic principles.

Persius puts support for the Horatian principles of style in the mouth of his Foil[136] and opponent, and it is important to notice the *nunc demum* at the beginning of line 64. Persius is not criticizing Horace here, but the decades-old refinement and culmination ("at last!") of the Horatian principle to the point where verse has become *rancidulus* (33). The Augustan achievement, represented by Horace in his programmatic statements, has been taken to its extreme, with the result that the overworked, over-polished verse now being produced is just the rotten little leftovers of a great literary achievement. Persius takes Horace and makes him new by grotesqueing him: Horace's lines are out of context, redeployed, parodied, juxtaposed with obscenity, and thereby reborn. Persius' project, more than that of any of the other satirists, is the rebirth of poetry by filtering the Julio-Claudians' greatest poetic theorist through the lens of the Neronian grotesque.

Horace the man gets the grotesque treatment in Satire 1 as well, further establishing the close relationship between Horace and Persius and the nexus of imagery with the visual arts and the Neronian grotesque. Near the end of the poem, Persius invokes Horace by name, specifically, the name they share:

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[135] See Fiske (1913: 21), Hooley (1997: 48).

[136] Braund call the other voice in Persius' poem his "Interlocutor," (as do many others). I think "Foil" makes for a better representation of the character in my reading of the poem. As I compare translations, I will identify this other voice with an F in my own translations, and in Braund's translation he is abbreviated with an I.

> omne vafer vitium ridenti Flaccus amico
> tangit et admissus circum praecordia ludit,
> callidus excusso populum suspendere naso.
> (Satire 1, 116-118)
>
> Sly Flaccus for his laughing friend touches on
> every flaw and, after he's in, plays around his heart,
> clever at hanging the people from his cleaned out nose.

This passage will be discussed in greater detail below, but here it's Horace's nose that sticks out. Persius describes it as *excussus*, traditionally rendered as "cleaned out" from *excutere*. Already the image of Horace dangling the people from his nose conjures something of a grotesque image, of course, but the grotesquing here, I think, is specifically a return to the *Ars Poetica* where Horace states that he'd rather have an ugly nose than write in a disjointed style. Persius gives him his ugly nose. Further, the choice of *excusso* here is a subtle pun as well. Horace makes his claim in the context of the ongoing analogy of writing as sculpture. "Cleaned out" for the nose works as a grotesque description, of course, implying porousness and bodily function, but the verb *excudere*, used of working with bronze,[137] also has a participle that can be written *excussus.*[138] Thus we are also looking at a statue of Horace, with the very feature he likened to the kind of grotesque sculpture that his poetic principles are at odds with in the *Ars Poetica*.

So this new Flaccus, this grotesque Horace, through constant allusion to the old model, shows his literary circle how the Augustans can be reconfigured through deformation rather than imitation. Persius' language and style themselves, more than any other of the Neronian era, are grotesque and therefore misconstrued by

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[137] See Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.847-8: "excudent alii spirantia mollius aera/(credo equidem), vivos ducent de marmore vultus."
[138] TLL vol 5^2, 1290.21, 58.

modern readers as ugly or bizarre. Shero (1922: 149) speaks of "the labored eccentricity in the presentation of even the most commonplace ideas, the abrupt and often unmotivated transitions, the crabbedness of the dialogue, the prevailing obscurity;" their "crabbedness" is also noted by Sullivan (1985: 111); Freudenberg (2001: 127) says that "the sights these poems give us to see are, for the most part, terribly disorienting and hard to look at, and the sounds they give us to hear grate on the ear." Persius characterizes himself in Satire 5.14 as a writer who is *iunctura callidus acri* (clever at a harsh fit).[139] This characterization in turn is, of course, an allusion to Horace, and a particularly pointed one. Horace's phrase, again from the *Ars Poetica,* talks of careful writing and making words new:

> In verbis etiam tenuis cautusque serendis
> dixeris egregie, notum si callida verbum
> reddiderit iunctura novum. 46-48
>
> Careful and delicate in composing the words
> you will have said something special, if a clever
> fit should make a familiar word new.

Tenuis and *iunctura* (in Horace's sense) are the targets of Persius' objections to what writing has become in Satire 1. Persius transfers the descriptive *callida* from the *iunctura* in Horace to himself, and the *iunctura* is now *acris*. What makes this such a pointed and programmatic statement is not only Persius' espousal of a grotesque

[139] While all agree that *iuncturae acres* are part of Persius' program, there are different interpretations of the phrase that critics and commentators illustrate with a variety of elements of Persius' style. Harvey (1981: 130-131) identifies five different types, all relating to metaphor and word choice, and lists examples extensively. Anderson (1982: 185-189) identifies a wide field of metrical effects in addition to word choice, finding a remarkable concentration of *iuncturae ac*res in lines 85-87 of Satire 1. Bartsch (2015: 149-155) focuses on "ancient discussions of word arrangement" (150), particularly Cicero and Quintilian in her look at the phenomenon.

style opposed to the Horatian one with a Horatian allusion, but the context of the original lines of Horace. In those lines, the goal of Horace's *iunctura* is to make words "new;" rebirth and renovation of the Augustan models through the grotesque is Persius' program, and he will be doing this consistently through his own "harsh fittings" of words, phrases, images, and allusions. Dessen (1968)[140] and, apparently independently, Sullivan (1985: 111), describing Persius' style, borrow from Samuel Johnson:[141] "'the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together.'" This violent yoking is the *acris iunctura* that is such a characteristic feature of Persius' style. It is the linguistic equivalent to those stalks culminating in human and animal heads that Vitruvius finds so offensive in painting, and which Horace intensifies in his image of the horse with the human head as an allegory for poor writing. The very thing that Horace abhors will, ironically, make him new in the Neronian grotesque.

Bartsch (2015: 51) goes a long way towards grappling with the imagery and language in Persius as grotesque, but her vision is dark: "Persius, in adopting the metaphor of consumption but exploring its darker side and indeed pushing it to the level of cannibalism, flips all ... positive connotations on their head. Those who read or listen to the bad poetry of their peers ... are engaging in the disgusting act of (metaphorically) consuming human flesh and each other, and instead of being steeped in learning they are merely grotesquely ill." Bartsch takes Persius' grotesque imagery and marries it (admittedly with discomfort) to Stoicism,

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[140] In the Preface to the First Edition, pg. x.
[141] Johnson was describing the "wit" of the metaphysical poets in his biography of John Donne in his *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779).

identifying a running thread of malnourishment, poison, and cannibalism as metaphors for both society and poetry; Persius' "anhedonic" (2015: 133) poetry is the Stoic cure--a poetic vegetarian diet of sorts. Bartsch's reaction to Persius' grotesque language and imagery, particularly his focus on the material bodily lower stratum, is along the lines of Kayser's vision of the grotesque. She feels that Persius' aim is to create horror and disgust, and that his own project is the Stoic *pharmakon* that adresses the ills of society and especially poetry. While her attention to Persius' imagery and language correctly identifies its grotesque nature, her reaction to the grotesque, from the perspective of classical culture, ultimately leads her to a fairly typical (though sensationalized) reading of Persius as a moralizing philosopher.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, Paul Miller (2005) specifically rejects the application of the term “grotesque” to any Roman (verse) satire. Roman satire is not grotesque in Bakhtin's sense of the word because it lacks the virtue of rebirth and renewal that needs to accompany its imagery.[142] Roman satire is sterile. In discussing Persius’ Satire 1, he says that “the grotesque marriage of food and sexuality in Persius’ satire brings forth, not a new generation of laughing giants, but sterility, decline, and ultimately death. It is not so much a feast for the ears as a plague” (404-405). Here is one place where Persius and the other Neronian grotesque satirists differ from Bakhtin’s version of the grotesque, which in its

[142] This seems an overly strict interpretation, and one that is possibly wrong. Bakhtin's point consistently is that ambivalent, grotesque imagery always carries the seeds and the promise of rebirth and renewal, and that that promise was commonly understood and accepted (see, for example, 1968: 430). The point was not that the plot resulted in rebirth, but that there was automatically a "regenerating and renewing element of the images, already lost in Europe's literary consciousness" (1968: 152).

specifics probably ought to be termed the Rabelaisian grotesque. The imagery that Miller concludes is not grotesque, because it offers no new birth, is only "sterile" (granting his reading of it for the moment) on the surface. The principal of renewal in Persius takes place on the literary level: renewal and rebirth of literature and poetry (in this case most specifically of Horace) are the *result* of this grotesque imagery, and a perfectly legitimate rebirth in the context of a poem about poetry! The laughing giants that Miller is looking for aren't in the poems; they are writing them, and they are the poems themselves. This is a feature of the Neronian grotesque that differs substantially from Bakhtin's concept without really violating its principles. Birth and renewal must be central to anything deemed "grotesque," but that renewal can take many forms.

Was Persius political? Traditionally, he has been painted more as a retiring, bookish moralist; however, Sullivan (1985: 108) sees Persius at the other end of the spectrum. Persius' moral stance, opposed to "Neronian culture," combines with his literary stance, a rejection of Neronian art, to openly and fearlessly oppose the emperor: "How is this connected with the imperial politics of the Neronian age? The issue, and the connection, is morality, which in ancient aesthetic theory was closely linked to and reflected in the character of a man's writing: in a very important sense, le style est l'homme même! Few would have espoused this principle more fiercely than Persius." This is ultimately not far from the usual interpretation of Persius as a satirist of Nero and Neronian culture, though it does grant him a more lively, even aggressive, stance through the equation of literary style with moral character. But the inclusion of Nero among Persius' unnamed

targets is difficult to justify without taking the scholia and the Suetonian biography completely at their word. According to both the scholia and the *Vita,*[143] for example, in Satire 1 Persius had originally written *Mida rex* in place of *quis non* at line 121. The resulting line would have been "auriculas asini Mida Rex habet" and was supposedly an allusion to Nero's poor taste that his post mortem editor expunged.[144] Sullivan (1978) rejects this anecdote, but takes the scholiasts more or less at their word that Persius is directly targeting Nero and his poetic tastes at lines 104-105, the passage mocking/parodying/quoting a poem about Attis, based on Suetonius' account of Nero producing a poem of that name in *Life of Nero* 59 at his Ludi Iuvenales (also reported by Dio, 62.20). Sullivan's argument that Persius is attacking Nero is built by extrapolating from evidence such as titles, reports from Dio, and inferences about content and style. Nero's *Troica*, which we don't have, must for example be a Callimachean anti-epic because Paris is portrayed as a manly

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[143] Sullivan (1978: 159-160) sums up the *Vita* and all of the scholia on this topic.
[144] See Harvey (1981: 51) and, for an exhaustive discussion, Kißel (1990: 267-271), who notes that "Während eine Minderheite der Persiusphilologen von Casaubon bis Bo mit Rücksicht auf diese Tradition auriculas asini Mida rex habet in den Persiustext aufgenommen hat, wird die Geschichte sonst in der Regel als bloße Erfindung abgetan" (1990: 269). This inclination in some to take the story at face value is built rather circularly, it seems, on the insistence that Persius was first and foremost a moralizer, support for which comes in part from anecdotes like this. Casaubon (1695: 31) says, "in Persio vero qui spiritus? qui ardor? qui stimuli? nam libertas quidem tanta, ut ne mortis quidem metu adduci potuerit, quo Neroni parceret ... sed acrem faciebat impressum eius animo, altisq. nixum radicibus, vitiorum odium." (In Persius what truly is the spirit? The ardor? The stimulus? Indeed his liberty was so great that he was not able by fear even of death to be convinced to spare Nero ... But a hatred of vices made a sharp impression in his mind, supported by deep roots.) Kißel himself seems willing to consider the authenticity of the story, but ultimately concludes "ergeben sich hieraus keine Konsequenzen für die Konstitution des Persiustextes; besteht doch die Aufgabe der philologischen Kritik" (1990: 270).

hero.[145] Sullivan reads Persius as anti-Callimachean, and therefore asserts that it is "reasonable to conclude that Persius selected one of Nero's best known poems, delivered at a widely publicized festival, as his prime target and the prime example of decadent neo-Callimachean verse practice" (1978: 170).

If however, Persius is read as in line with the Neronian program, which in many ways he clearly is, then he can be read as political quite easily. Persius' rejection of played out Augustan forms are a cry for something new, as we have seen. Horace made new through the Neronian grotesque is a logical, literary analogy for the principate made new through Nero, a suggestion already made by Seneca in the *Apocolocyntosis*. Freudenberg's (2005: 129ff) take on Persius' political point revolves around the "disturbing uglification" of Nero's world that he sees in Persius: "His world is fake, soulless, and rotten to the core, and that rottenness, he gives us to suspect, comes from the top down, devolving, in the most obvious instance, from the experimental workshop of Nero's literary coterie." But this interpretation depends on the idea that Nero, along with his coterie, was imitating, rather than emulating and challenging Augustus and the literary achievements under his regime; that Nero's coterie didn't include Seneca, Lucan, and Persius, though they were writing poetry at court; and that Persius stood apart from all of this anyway. In Freudenberg's reading, Persius' uglification of Horace is his exposé of Neronian culture as an ugly nightmare version of what was good. This reading doesn't allow that Persius' aesthetic could be read as anything other than "ugly" and does not take into account similar "ugly" artistic efforts generated by Nero's coterie

[145] Sullivan (1978: 168-169).

in literature and the visual arts. However, Persius' grotesqueing of Horace seems very much in step with Nero's confrontation with Augustan aesthetic principles, and therefore places him, if not in Nero's coterie, then in sympathy with its artistic and, ultimately, political aspirations. Read from that standpoint, Persius' poems take on a very different color. They can be read, first and foremost, as scathingly funny, because the poet is *not* shaking "his head in hopeless disgust;"[146] he is laughing, as he says he is in Satire 1, at the holdovers and the "hangover" from the previous decades of Julio-Claudian rule. He can laugh because he sees the birth of something new coming, and he is a part of it.

The Prologue

Persius' book of satires promises something new from the outset. As a rejection of the old, Persius makes his point immediately with the first line of his prologue, both through form and through word choice:

> Nec fonte labra prolui caballino
> nec in bicipiti somniasse Parnaso
> memini, ut repente sic poeta prodirem.
> Heliconidasque pallidamque Pirenen
> illis remitto quorum imagines lambunt
> hederae sequaces; ipse semipaganus
> ad sacra vatum carmen adfero nostrum.

> No, I didn't wet my lips at the spring of the ol' workhorse
> and I don't recall having a dream on twin-peaked Parnassus
> to make me come out--just like that--a composer.
> I give up the daughters of Helicon and the Pirene (makes you weak)
> to those whose statues tongues of ivy cling to; me, I'm a little bit
> country, but I offer up my songs on the altar of the Poets.

[146] Freudenberg (2005: 130).

The very first word is a negation of what has come before, *nec*, and Persius moves on from there to negate expectation, cliché, and tradition. Both his use of choliambic meter and his snarky *fonte ... caballino* (spring of the ol' workhorse) let his audience know that this will not be a typical (Horatian? heroic? Augustan?) book of poetry. Inspiration from the Muses, their streams (including Pirene, sprung from the ground where Pegasus' foot struck), Mt. Helicon, etc. was a fairly common idea expressed in poetry. Examples from the Augustan age occur in Horace (*Odes* 1.26.6-10) and Ovid (*Amores* 3.9.25-26), both of whom refer to springs, and Vergil (*Eclogues* 6.64-73) who ties himself to Hesiod and speaks of the Aonian hills and streams of Permessus. Propertius, though, goes to this well most often of the Augustan poets,[147] and one in particular (3.3) stands out as having many points of contact with Persius' prologue:

> Visus eram molli recubans Heliconis in umbra,
> Bellerophontei qua fluit umor equi,
> reges, Alba, tuos et regum facta tuorum,
> tantum operis, nervis hiscere posse meis;
> parvaque iam magnis admoram fontibus ora
> ---
> cum me Castalia speculans ex arbore Phoebus
> sic ait aurata nixus ad antra lyra:
> 'quid tibi cum tali, demens, est flumine? quis te
> carminis heroi tangere iussit opus?
> non hinc ulla tibi sperandast fama, Properti:
> mollia sunt parvis prata terenda rotis ...
>
> Reclining in Helicon's easy shade where
> flows the stream of Belerophon's horse,
> I imagined, Alba, that I could sing along with my lyre
> about your kings and your kings' deeds, my magnum opus;
> I had already moved my puny mouth to the great spring
> ---
> when Phoebus, watching me from the Castalian woods
> said this, leaning on his golden lyre by the cave:
> "Are you insane? What does a river like this have to do with you?

[147] See 2.10.1-12, 3.1, 3.5.19-22.

> Who told you to put your hands to the work of heroic verse?
> There's no glory to be hoped for here, Propertius:
> little wheels have to roll over soft turf ...

The full panoply of Augustan poetic inspiration can be seen here in Propertius' pseudo-modest poem, and each element is echoed and in some way devalued by Persius in his prologue. For Persius, Helicon and Pegasus make you weak, *pallidus*, but they are also perhaps *pallidus* themselves at this point. Traditional poetic inspiration is tired, pale, worn-out. But the opening line of Persius' poem is more than a rejection of the old; it is programmatic in that sense but also in its immediate self-declaration as part of the new Neronian grotesque aesthetic. The word *caballino* in particular revels in a grotesque parody of poetry and poetic inspiration. Arguably, mythological hybrid creatures such as Pegasus are automatically in harmony with a grotesque aesthetic: popular, fantastical, defying proportion and harmony. It is worth noting that mythological and fantastical hybrids often appear in Neronian grotesque style wall painting in the Domus Aurea, to suggest a visual parallel, not to mention Horace's horse with a human head from the *Ars Poetica*. The popularity of and familiarity we have with Pegasus today should not cause us to discount him as a part of the world of the grotesque. Nevertheless, Persius takes the grotesquery and the parody even further by taking the lofty mythological image and bringing it down low. The word choice of *caballinus* mocks the tired cliché of poetic inspiration--it's now a worn-out old nag--but simultaneously refreshes the image through parody and word choice in the context of satiric humor. The word *caballus*

is colloquial,[148] and Pegasus is brought lower still through the use of the diminutive[149] in *caballino* as well, incorporating him more deeply within the world of the grotesque than his hybridity alone might do.

It is with this refreshed, grotesque Pegasus that Persius actually does align himself, ironically, by categorizing himself as a hybrid as well. In line 6 Persius effectively renders himself grotesque with the coined word *semipaganus*. This word operates within the grotesque aesthetic on three planes simultaneously: as a coined word, it is itself a compound-hybrid; the coining and playing with language is typical of grotesque wordplay in that it is a new and surprising conjunction of elements by which language itself becomes new. Further, the term, according to Braund (2004: 43), most likely identifies the poet with the folk festival of the Paganalia, making it a reference to a popular festival and therefore very much in line with the Neronian grotesque without being strictly Saturnalian. The Paganalia is a sort of bookend with Saturnalia, serving as a festival at the beginning of the sowing season. Ovid, *Fasti* 1.667-672, describes the rustic festival:

> Vilice, da requiem terrae semente peracta;
> da requiem, terram qui coluere, viris.
> pagus agat festum: pagum lustrate, coloni,
> et date paganis annua liba focis.
> placentur frugum matres, Tellusque Ceresque,
> farre suo gravidae visceribusque suis.
>
> Boss, give the land a break now that the planting's done;
> give the men who farmed the land a break.
> Let the village have a holiday: purify the village, farmers,

[148] Némethy (1903: 47) says "vulgari vocabulo utitur poeta," Bo (1969: 11): "adi. sermonis cotidiani;" both find the term used "ironice" Conington (1893: 138) sees it as "contemptuous," and Cowherd (1986: 37) echoes.
[149] Boyce (1991: 11) notes that diminutives are often used in literature to indicate popular parlance or a vulgar dialect and are generally "avoided by classical writers."

> and give the village hearths their yearly sacrificial cake.
> The crop mothers, Earth and Ceres, are pleased
> with their own grain as a sacrifice, and with the womb of a pregnant sow.

The address to the *vilicus* at the beginning of this passage, implying social strata and authority, followed by the dissolution of this into the festival of the entire *pagus*, echoes the leveling of strata of the Saturnalia, itself originally a holiday that revolves around grain. The offering of grain back to the Earth and of a pregnant sow's womb also imply the ongoing cycle of death and rebirth that is fundamental to the festive nature of the grotesque and its ambivalent imagery. Even the root of the word, *pagus*, is hybrid, carrying multiple meanings. While *pagus*, as discussed above, is a logical interpretation, Wehrle (1992: 6 n.5) correctly points out that the coinage *semipaganus* "would certainly have forced the Prologue's original readership to assess its meaning." Wehrle also suggests another option: *pagus* derives from *pangere*, one meaning of which is "to compose poetry." Thus *semipaganus* also means a "halfpoet."

Persius uses form as much as imagery and word play to build his grotesque poetry in his prologue, and it is interesting to look at his selection of the choliambic meter for his programmatic statement from the standpoint of its resonances with the Neronian grotesque. First, it is genre-rupturing in its rejection of the typical dactylic hexameter. That meter has always created an interesting resonance with the other genre that makes so much use of it: epic. Immediately, the confrontation between what is arguably aristocratic, noble, highbrow poetry and the low, loose, local, popular qualities of satire help to align satire with the Neronian grotesque. The direct parodies of epic found throughout satire are very much in keeping with

grotesque humor, and we have already seen Seneca engaging in a more direct confrontation with heroic hexameters in the *Apocolocyntosis*. But Persius eschews this in his programmatic poem (he'll have his cake and eat it too when he returns to dactylic hexameter for the satires themselves), and opts for an even generically lower form of poetry. According to Quintilian 10.1.96, iambics are actually beneath satire on the generic ladder, not much pursued by Roman poets, with only those by Horace worth reading. Thus Persius surprises and flouts expectation by moving lower, ever the direction of the grotesque. Further, choliambics are identified with the kind of insult poetry that is very much a part of the grotesque spirit of Saturnalia and other popular festivals. Thus, the choliambic stutter-step to this book of satires actually claims a lower rung on the ladder even than Horace did when he described his poetry as versiform chit-chat (*sermones*).

It is also tempting to see in the choice of the meter some (inside?) humor at the expense of the Neronian grotesque's first and most infamous target, Claudius. Persius' selection of limping iambs is the kind of esoteric, bookish joke we might expect Persius to aim at Claudius.[150] Assuming that, particularly early on, Claudius was one of the central butts of Neronian grotesque humor, this kind of metrical jab would have appealed to the likes of Seneca and Nero, as did Seneca's more obvious joke about Claudius' limp in his quote of Vergil. Just as Seneca's punning title *Apocolocyntosis* works on multiple levels, not all accessible to his entire audience, so

[150] Wehrle (1992: 6 n.4) sees a similar joke, but feels that Persius' target is "poets who are themselves 'limp' in respect to style, production, even inspiration." However, Wehrle seems to be mixing his English with his Greek--"limp" in English can be punned to mean what he wants here, but χωλός in Greek cannot. The pun could work with a slight adjustment: χωλός metaphorically can mean "defective" or "imperfect," but it's not as stinging a pun.

Persius' brand of the grotesque functions broadly, by generically degrading his book (at least at the outset) and with a nudge and a wink joke to those in the know. The Neronian grotesque is often an aesthetic of layers.

Pegasus makes his appearance twice more in these fourteen lines. It is commonplace to read Persius' satire with an eye to the "dominant metaphor"[151] of each individual poem. Pegasus is certainly the most likely candidate for this one. By taking a mythological hybrid and rendering him low, Persius is offering a grotesque reimagining of the poetry of his day. But what is the poetry of his day? Typically, as we have seen with Seneca's parody of contemporary verse, Persius is assumed to be decrying the excesses of the Neronian court and the emperor's own outlandish taste. Consider instead the idea that Persius, like Seneca and Nero, wanted something new. The poetry they are mocking, the grotesque Pegasan nectar, is not Neronian at all, but the dying corpse of Augustanism's poetic great-great-grandchildren.

The poem divides neatly into two halves, the first being about Persius himself and where he does (not) get his inspiration. The second half (lines 8-14) revolves around various images of poetic and talking birds, all of them in some way grotesques.

> quis expedivit psittaco suum "chaere"
> picamque docuit nostra verba conari?
> magister artis ingenique largitor
> venter, negatas artifex sequi voces.
> quod si dolosi spes refulserit nummi,
> corvos poetas et poetridas picas
> cantare credas Pegaseium nectar.
>
> Who unleashed from the parrot his "ciao"
> and taught the magpie to try out our words?

[151] See e.g. Braund (2004: 17) or Dessen (1968) *passim*.

> The gut is the master of art and generous donor of talent--
> an artist at making once rejected words sound natural.
> But if the hope of seductive cash should glitter,
> you'd believe that crow poets and poetess magpies
> were singing Pegasus' nectar.

The notion of a talking bird is in itself grotesque--these are *voces negatae*--but Persius keeps the parrot on a lower level by having him squawk *chaere*. The choice of the Greek greeting is noteworthy (Persius turns to Greek again in Satire 1). Persius here is having some fun at traditional poets' expense: a principal inspiration for the Augustan movement was Hellenistic poetry, Greek poetry, refined, erudite, and sophisticated. One of the assertions of the Neronian grotesque is that Augustan literature is played out, degraded, exhausted. Vergil may have been wonderful, Ovid a culmination of sorts, but their successors are imitators who don't really know what they're saying and can only manage a debased manner of expression. The metaphor for that in Persius is the street Greek, like *chaere*, that the parrot repeats. The poets Persius despises are the ones who imitate the greats, the ones inspired by Pegasus, but who are themselves debased imitators of those great poets. Persius offers something new and different with his take on the grotesque.

Persius brings in two more birds near the end of the poem, magpies and crows. Here he does something a little different: rather than ascribing speech to them, as to the parrot and the magpie above, he now hybridizes them with poets and poetesses. While this kind of noun doubling is actually quite unusual in Latin, which prefers to render one of the two nouns in adjective form, Persius eschews *poeticas picas* in favor of *poetridas picas*. The syntax is unusual, even jarring, a first *iunctura acris*, and characteristic of Persius' take on Neronian grotesque style. The

image is fresher and livelier, more invigorated because it is phrased in an unusual way. Wehrle (1992: 7) argues that Persius' *iuncturae acres* are, in fact, part of the programmatic statement: "P. *deliberately* and with express purpose (i.e., to accent the unoriginality of more 'traditional' poets) inserts these (apparently) discontinuous *iuncturae acres* into contexts which intend to upset and even break down formal poetic ('vatic/bardic') convention." As language is renewed, so is poetry.

On a different level, Persius grammatically creates hybrid grotesque creatures, part bird, part poet. It is tempting in the *poetridas* (a hapax)[152] *picas* also to read "descendants of poets," rather than actual poets, treating the unusual suffix *-idas* as the Greek *-ιδαι* indicating descent[153] (these birds do speak Greek, after all). Then we have Persius zeroing in on the imitators of today by identifying them as the descendants of Augustan era poets and then as imitative magpies, not understanding their own speech.

Another bit of fun Persius may be having is in his selection of these birds. The *pica*, the *psittacus*, and the *corvus* all are, according to Martial (*Epigrams* 14.73, 14.74, 14.76) gifts given at the time of the Saturnalia.[154] All three of the birds are described in a two-line epigram for each one as talking or greeting people. These Saturnalian bird-gifts, blended with poets, then present a grotesque and festive echo of Catullus' classic poem in which he chides his friend for giving him a book of bad

[152] TLL Vol. 10.1.14-17, pp. 2522.
[153] On the analogy of Heraclidae as descendants of Heracles.
[154] The only other bird mentioned as a gift is the nightingale (*luscinia*) at 14.75.

poetry as a prank Saturnalia gift (Catullus 14). Persius' *Saturae* then become a Saturnalian antidote to the bad poetry/grotesque birds given as festive gifts.

Another feature of the grotesque that Persius favors is the disembodied body part, and in his Prologue he presents us with the grotesque ne plus ultra, *Venter*. Here the Gut is the *magister artis et ingeni largitor* (line 10). Typically these lines are read as the answer to the question posed above: "Who taught the parrot his "ciao" and the magpie to try out our words? Master of arts and generous donor of talent--the gut." Wehrle (1992: 8) suggests that, "transferred to the larger context of (Neronian) literary society, the term might conjure up images of sloth, sluggishness, *appetentia*, *luxuria*." Freudenberg (2001: 144) reads *Venter* as Nero, and thus the lines neatly conform to the traditional reading of Persius as bashing Nero and his poets. But there is an awkwardness to this reading, I think. The next line begins *quod si* ... Most translators seem to translate these words loosely or just ignore them. Here is Braund's (2002b: 67) translation:

> Who equipped the parrot with his "Hello" and taught the magpie to attempt human speech? It was that master of expertise, that bestower of talent, the belly--an expert at copying sounds denied by nature. Just let the prospect of deceitful money gleam and you'd think raven poets and poetess magpies were chanting the nectar of Pegasus.

Braund's article is about translating this poem and features nine offerings by her students as well as Dryden's from 1693 and Guy Lee's from 1987. None of these suggest that there is a contrast present in the phrase *quod si*. Lee's, like Braund's, ignores the words, changing them to "and" to create continuity rather than contrast. But *quod si* is most commonly a contrasting conjunction setting up a condition: "but

if." I would suggest that another reading of these lines is possible: "Who taught the parrot his "ciao" and the magpie to try out our words? The gut is the master of art, the generous donor of talent. But if the hope of seductive cash should glitter, you'd believe poet magpies and poet crows were singing the nectar of Pegasus." Typically, *venter* and *nummi* are read essentially as exemplars of the same type of greed that has turned poetry into such a mess. Bartsch (2015: 53ff) sees the belly being used this way, and in her running culinary metaphor for Persius' poems she sees a "connection between the belly's demands and speaking to please." Interestingly, she references the beginning of Hesiod's *Theogony* (24-28) as support for the interpretation:

> τόνδε δέ με πρώτιστα θεαὶ πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπον,
> Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο·
> “ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι, κάκ’ ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἷον,
> ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
> ἴδμεν δ’ εὖτ’ ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι.”
>
> The goddesses spoke this word to me from the very first,
> the Olympian Muses, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis:
> "You shepherds who dwell in the fields, miserable disgraces, mere bellies,
> we know how to speak many false things that are like real ones,
> but we know how to proclaim true things when we like."

This reading of Hesiod works from the point of view of elite culture--bellies are bad. But what Bartsch doesn't account for is context here. This is Hesiod's account of his transformation from rustic to poet, inspired by the Muses on the slopes of Mt. Helicon. This is all the machinery that Persius, in the first half of the poem, has explicitly rejected. He's not interested in the daughters of Helicon--they haven't transformed him. He's also identified himself as at least *semipaganus*, as opposed to the condescending tone the Muses take to Hesiod and his fellow shepherds as

ἄγραυλοι. So Persius, having rejected any sort of Hesiodic transformation, remains a belly, and in Persius' program that's a positive.

V*enter* in a grotesque context is the bodily image of the feast and of grotesque debasement and renewal. There are two different sources for knowledge of poetry here, rather than one: cash which prompts greedy hacks to teach birds to talk and say it's as good as the poets of old, versus the gut, who is the true source of knowledge and talent, a new kind of poetry based on fertile bodies and lavish feasts that embraces what has traditionally been rejected. In this grotesque image we may choose to see *venter* as Nero, à la Freudenberg, or not, but it is important not to immediately ascribe a negative interpretation to that word. In grotesque imagery, the stomach is symbolic of birth and fertility among other things, a fact reinforced by the other Latin meaning of *venter* as "womb." A big gut (which is how Nero *chose* to portray himself, contrary to Augustan portrait types) signifies fecundity and celebration, the kind of festive rebirth at the heart of grotesque imagery and the Neronian program. Nero was not the only source of wealth: there were plenty of wealthy men paying for bad poetry to be produced, and in the last line of this poem it isn't Nero who is implicated in the decline of taste, it is you, the reader. Cash in these last lines doesn't (just) make bad poetry, it makes you believe that the bad poetry--the magpies and crows--sounds like the nectar of Pegasus. Here, finally, we get the winged horse's name. He is returned to his full status as high poetic inspiration, because he is there as a contrast to what passes for poetry now. Pegasus (a bird hybrid) is the glory of past poetry, the bird hybrid poets of today sound nothing like him. But YOU will say they do, if the price is right.

Satire 1

The grotesque, according to Bakhtin, is a laughing resistance to dogma and to "official culture." A major part of Roman Imperial official culture is often its literary and artistic expression, and one of the principles of the Neronian grotesque is a rejection of official culture, i.e. traditional, Augustan culture, in all of its artistic incarnations. One of the pillars of the Neronian revolution was art, and Neronian era satire leads the charge in its rejection of traditional literature and of the bloated, dead body it has become. Thus on multiple levels at once Persius' first satire logically sets out a grotesque program for the writing of poetry.

In keeping with these Neronian literary concerns, Persius gives us a double dose of programmatic literary intent in his prologue and then his first satire. Writing and how it's done matter to Persius, and his concern with the state of literature would seem to ally him with the artists at Nero's court. However, Persius' passionate poems about writing, once they are filtered through the usual lens of anti-Neronian sentiment and the need for satire to "satirize," are read as something quite different by the majority of critics. The usual reading of Persius is that, while he may be writing about writing, he's *really* writing about morals. "Style is the man" becomes the refrain when discussing this poem, and Persius' thoughts about style are transformed into the expected satirist's critique of Neronian culture and moral decay.

The most detailed elaboration of this interpretation of Persius' first satire is J. C. Bramble's *Persius and the Programmatic Satire*. Bramble (1974: 12) sensitively

reads Persius' stylistic inventiveness as an "attempt to escape the oppressive weight of convention;" he gets that Persius is something of a rebel in his writing, and that the rebellion is against the smooth monolith that is the legacy of the Augustan era: "the elder Seneca justly criticized Ovid for not knowing when to leave well enough alone; Persius probably harbored similar feelings about the ... great rhetorician-poet who left such a deep imprint on the literature of the first century" (1974: 12). But while Bramble sees in Persius some degree of rebellion against the literary conventions of an overly refined Augustan approach, he is unwilling to accord this literary concern of Persius the spotlight. A literary revolution isn't enough in the Neronian era, and Bramble almost immediately advances the reading of style for morals: "First, we notice that Persius' program deals with the blight which has invaded contemporary literature; secondly, that this blight is indicative of moral deficiency. Through criticism of style, the satirist effects another, more serious criticism--of morals" (1974: 16). Here Bramble betrays his own pre-loaded belief about what (good) satire does: his statement that criticism of morals is "more serious" than a criticism of literary style indicates Bramble's view of what proper satire does, and his substitution of "the satirist" for Persius seems to make the assertion a more general statement of what Bramble believes to be the true purpose of satire.[155]

There are several problems with this reading of Persius, manifest in Bramble as they are in others espousing the style-for-morals interpretation of this satire.

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[155] In a footnote Bramble (1974: 19) acknowledges that "it must be admitted that in the Roman context 'satire' and 'satirist' do not invariably have predominantly moral connotations." This admission does not seem to inform his reading of Persius.

First, dealt with in more detail below, is the automatic attribution of all criticism in the satire to the voice of Persius. This results in a fairly undisciplined and at times incoherent rant, which Bramble himself admits.[156] Another problem is that Bramble tends to build his moral reading of Persius' satire primarily through identifying specific imagery and metaphor; this can work, but in doing so he divorces imagery and metaphor from their context in the poem. This at several points leads to a misreading of the connotation of an image or the meaning of a metaphor. As an example, consider his take on old age. Bramble builds a case for Persius' use of *canities* and related words as code for homosexual hypocrisy: "On seeing *canitiem, nostrum istud vivere triste*, and *patruos*, the reader is perhaps at first puzzled. What lies behind the pose? Lines 13 ff. give the full explanation: sexual perversion."[157] This depends on the attribution of those lines to Persius' voice (more on that below), but it also ignores the phrase in line 10 between *nostrum istud vivere triste* and *patruos:* "nucibus facimus quaecumque relictis" (everything we do after the fun's over). It's difficult to argue that old age isn't old age (*pace* Jahn, (1843: 80), who says "non de aetate intelligendum est ...") when a contrast is being drawn to youth and play. In Bramble's reading old age stands for severity, but a severity that is simply a mask for the wild sexual perversion he sees described in the lines that follow. I believe that this stance is awkward given *nucibus ... relictis*.

The majority of critics seem intent on reading Persius' poem on poetry as

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[156] See, for example, 58: "In qualification I should add that, particularly in the second half of the satire, dramatization is more spasmodic, individual physical images appearing at first sight to be somewhat randomly interwoven with an uneven texture of argument."

[157] Page 71. See also the case built through secondary readings in note 1 on page 42: "*canities* is the disguise of the homosexual moralist."

really about morality, due to the consistent attribution of all negative statements in the poem to Persius, rather than his Foil. In the mouth of Persius, these statements of outrage must be taken seriously, and the moral become conflated with the critical. Fiske (1913: 19), for example, in his comparison of Satire 1 with Horace's *Ars Poetica*, asserts that Persius' "own main concern is after all rather with literature as a social phenomenon than with literature as an art." The "after all" here certainly indicates that this reading of Persius is a given. Shero (1922: 167) sees in this poem a "single conventional type," noting "similarities of theme and treatment" between this poem, Horace's first satire in Book 2 of the *Sermones*, and Juvenal's first satire. Shero sees all three of these poems as answering the question *Cur satiras scribat*? (quoting the scholiast on Juvenal 1). The argument is flawed, however, by taking for granted the point at hand: in his discussion (1922: 158-159) of lines 8-11 and 119-121, for instance, he says that the poet "must have his laugh, we infer, because of the existence of follies which compel his laughter." He ignores the context of the literary discussion and the stated secret that all of Rome has ass's ears. While some elements documented by Shero do appear common to these three satires, the claim that all three are an *apologia* for writing (the satirizing kind of) satire instead of, at least in Persius' case, a programmatic poem about poetry, is stretched. Shero feels, however, that this type of poem was virtually a requirement for a writer of verse satire. Keeping Persius' concern about poetry foregrounded, then, Persius has made a change to the formula: Persius is writing (grotesque) satire *because* of his literary concerns. Kenney (1962: 35-36) also reads Persius' poem as following a "pattern of apology." While "obviously programmatic ... the body of the satire between vv. 12

and 120 is taken up with a dissertation on literature and morals at Rome." As with Shero, Kenney sees no need to make a distinction between the two: when Persius is criticizing literature, he is (really) criticizing morals. When he discusses line 103, for example, he says that Persius' indignation becomes overpowering, and he appeals to the stern example of olden times: "could such things be if any trace of the old Roman masculinity survived in us?" But the "such things" here are the verses of a contemporary poetic work--the outrage is of an artist, not a moralist.

A minority of critics do see Satire 1 as primarily a poem about poetry, though not necessarily a programmatic one. Cartault (1921) for instance sees Persius' first satire as concerned primarily with poetry and the wide range of poetic vices. He says that "la poésie qu'il critique dans la Sat. 1 est la poésie d'amateurs, telle que la pratiquaient autour de lui les grands seigneurs" (1921: 66). He goes on to indicate the two trends that Persius is reacting to: "certains rédigent de petites élégies ... d'autres avaient de grandes ambitions et se donnaient commes les représentants du sublime" (1921: 67). For Cartault, Persius' answer to these ills is simply "satire," the genre that still retains the "génie romain" that he feels is lacking in the derivative literature of his day. Cartault remains consistently within the realm of poetry, and his reading to me seems right, though not very detailed. He does not address the contradictions in what Persius says, assuming (as he does) that all critical lines are attributed to Persius. This makes for multiple strains of inconsistent criticism that cannot necessarily be answered on a generic level by satire. Korfmacher (1933) too focuses on Persius as a literary critic, primarily reacting to the excessive Alexandrine influence and asserts "as a cardinal principle in the critical code of

Persius a keen aversion to products of the Alexandrine school" (1933: 281). The problem with this reading is that it is almost purely negative: Persius is assigned all the negative reaction, no matter to what. Korfmacher simply ignores the inconsistencies in characterization in favor of a reading of Persius as critic without a program. Kißel (1990: 102), like Kenney before him, reads this poem as "dem traditionellen Repertoire satirischer Programmgedichte verpflichtet," without the focus on morality, but more deeply concerned than its Lucilian and Horatian predecessors with an apology for writing satire and a condemnation of the contemporary state of poetry. Kißel's reading, though, like so many others, sees diagnosis, but no prescription for the cure: "Persius (anders als Horaz: sat.1,4;10) auf eine ausführliche--und damit automatische auch rechtfertigende--Darlegung seiner eigenen, im wesentlichen ja eher negativ determinierten (vgl.5,10-15) Kriterien künstlerischer Gestaltung verzichten" (1990: 105). But this reading as negative and deterministic is a return to reading the satire as a muddled and inconsistent rant against ... everything. Persius' own assertions of laughter at the beginning and end of the poem argue against so negative a reading. Persius sees the problem and states it, but he also offers a counterproposal, something new.

For Persius, the problem with writing begins with the giants, especially Horace, but also Lucilius and Vergil. But Persius' quarrel with them is indirect. His point is not that their poetry is bad--he quotes them with respect. Rather, they have become petrified as part of official culture. They are standards that are held up to present day artists to confine and limit their own poetry. As such, they are part of the problem: poetry has decayed into a sick, lifeless imitation of the "classical"

writers held up as the standards by Julio-Claudian tradition. Persius' quarrel is with the poor quality of the degenerate imitations of those classics and with the ossifying notion of a "classic" itself.

That Persius has a lot to say about contemporary poets and poetry in Satire 1 is a given. But once the assumption that Persius is writing from an anti-Neronian stance, from an outsider's stance, is layered onto the poem, what Persius has to say becomes a bit murkier. Persius comes off as a rather confused and agitated critic of pretty much everything, with no ideas of his own beyond the generally accepted one: Nero and Neronian Rome are sick, decadent, and the poetry of Neronian Rome is a symptom of the disease. This is the satire of a moral, bookish Stoic, railing against his time and his emperor from a distance.

This assumption seems to govern the interpretation of the poem right down to the distribution of who says what between Persius and his Foil. Anything and everything negative is put in Persius' mouth, and thus he becomes the voice for the Lucilian quote/paraphrase with which he begins, and which nobody will hear. Reading these lines through a grotesque lens, though, allows for a different reading of the poem that is more coherent, funnier, and which turns out to be very much consistent with the Neronian grotesque aesthetic plan. In the following, the Latin is given without the traditional assignment of lines. I will use Braund's translation throughout this discussion as representative of the traditional interpretation to contrast with my own.

Satire 1 begins with a quotation or paraphrase. The first line is often thought to be a quote from Lucilius, though this is far from certain.[158] It could just as likely be evidence of the oppressive nature of literary dogma: Persius' or someone else's attempt to write *like* Lucilius. Traditionally, the first few lines of the poem are divided between Persius and his imaginary Foil thus:

> O curas hominum! o quantum est in rebus inane!
> quis leget haec? min tu istud ais? nemo hercule. (Satire 1.1-2)
>
> P: "How troubled is humanity! How very empty is life!"
> I: Who'll read that?
> P: Are you talking to me? No one, for God's sake.[159]

I think another possible reading of this opening, given some strength by *haec*, is that Persius is asking himself the question in frustration or disbelief. He's holding the book, reading the first line out loud, and rhetorically asking himself "who is going to read this stuff (I have right here)?" His Foil is pulled in not at the quote, but by the question. The exact provenance of the quote that Persius makes is not known, but it works on any level as a presentation of the trouble with stuffy dogma. If it is a quote from Lucilius, the problem is that no one wants to read that kind of poetry anymore. The degenerate imitations, smoother and more enervated, are the taste of the day. But even richer is the possibility that this is a mock-quote of some piece of contemporary literature (the first of several). Persius is reading some blowhard's first line and can't stand it. The final possibility is even more dramatic and

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[158] Lucretius is also offered as a candidate by commentators, though, as Bramble (1974: 67n.1) notes, a Lucilian reference at the beginning of this poem is far more coherent and logical. Wehrle (1992: 13) also credits the line to Lucilius and feels that "P.'s reader is at once alerted that the subject to be treated involves 'the cares of mankind' and the inanity of human affairs."
[159] The translation is Braund's (2004).

intriguing: Persius himself has written this line, feeling pressure to conform. After one (bad) line, Persius the literary rebel bursts out: "Who would read this stuff? I don't want to write like this!" The poem then begins with an act of literary rebellion, and the rest of the poem is simultaneously programmatic and exemplary of the kind of poetry that Persius is going to write from here on out: Neronian grotesque satire.

Persius' Foil joins the conversation prompted by Persius' rhetorical question:

> P: "How troubled is humanity! How very empty is life ..."
> Who's going to read this?
> F: Are you talking to me?
> P: ... *Nobody* will.

Persius then moves on to decry Rome's current literary taste: slavish imitation of official culture in the form of literary giants, be they Lucilius or be they (Labeo's) Homer. The image of Rome Persius paints here is consistent with typical targets of the grotesque. Romans are grey-haired uncles (on their father's side) and their living is grim, compared to the "youth" of Roman literary culture when, without dogma to restrain them, the Romans played as children with toys (lines 3-12). This idea of stiff old age, joyless and bound by dogma, versus youthful freedom and play, is central to popular-festive culture and to rebellious poetry. The old needs to die, and the child needs to be (re)born. The answer to this? In grotesque literature, as in festive culture, the ultimate answer to dogma, fear, oppression, decrepitude is laughter. It's Persius' answer too (line 12: *cachinno*).

That declaration seems to me to be central to the reading of this satire and to Persius' book, but it's one that tends to be diminished by most. This is Persius' grotesque, festive response to the putrefaction and petrification of literature. More

often than not, though, the rest of the poem and the book of satires tend to be read as serious indictments of "contemporary culture." Persius is telling his reader not to read him as a dour old Roman uncle, but as a laughing revolutionary. In this opening salvo, it is worth noting, there is absolutely no indication of the moral outrage that everyone wants to read into this poem. Persius' problem isn't effeminate, decadent culture. It's sick, gray, old-man culture that really bothers him.

Again, there is an opportunity to redistribute some of the "dialogue" of this poem so that it makes more sense and supports a coherent portrait of Persius as a bit more of a literary bad boy. Typically, Persius is assigned all the lines from the end of line 3 to 23:

> Quare?
> Ne mihi Polydamas et Troiades Labeonem
> praetulerint? Nugae. Non, si quid turbida Roma
> elevet, accedas examenve inprobum in illa
> castiges trutina nec te quaesiveris extra.
> Nam Romae quis non—a, si fas dicere—sed fas
> tum cum ad canitiem et nostrum istud vivere triste
> aspexi ac nucibus facimus quaecumque relictis,
> cum sapimus patruos. Tunc tunc—ignoscite (nolo,
> quid faciam?) sed sum petulanti splene—cachinno.
> Scribimus inclusi, numeros ille, hic pede liber,
> grande aliquid quod pulmo animae praelargus anhelet.
> Scilicet haec populo pexusque togaque recenti
> et natalicia tandem cum sardonyche albus
> sede leges celsa, liquido cum plasmate guttur
> mobile conlueris, patranti fractus ocello.
> Tunc neque more probo videas nec voce serena
> ingentis trepidare Titos, cum carmina lumbum
> intrant et tremulo scalpuntur ubi intima versu.
> Tun, vetule, auriculis alienis colligis escas,
> articulis quibus et dicas cute perditus 'ohe'? (3-23)
>
> Why's that? Because Polydamas and the Trojan dames might
> prefer Labeo to me? Rubbish! If muddled Rome disparages
> something, don't step in to correct the faulty balance in those
> scales and don't search outside yourself. The reason? Is there

> anyone at Rome who doesn't—oh, if only I could say it—but I may, when I look at our grey heads and that gloomy life of ours and everything we've been doing since we gave up our toys, since we started sounding like strict uncles. Then, then—excuse me (I don't want to, I can't help it), but I've got a cheeky temper—I cackle.
>
> We shut ourselves away and write some grand stuff, one in verse, another in prose, stuff which only a generous lung of breath can gasp out. And of course that's what you will finally read to the public from your seat on the platform, neatly combed and in your fresh toga, all dressed in white and wearing your birthday ring of sardonyx, after you have rinsed your supple throat with a liquid warble, in a state of enervation with your orgasmic eye. Then, as the poetry enters their backsides and as their inmost parts are tickled by verse vibrations, you can see huge Tituses quivering, both their respectable manner and their calm voice gone. What, you old reprobate, do you compose morsels for other people's ears, morsels which would make even you, with your joints and skin decayed, say, "Enough!"?

There are two problems with this arrangement. First, Persius seems to be contradicting himself. He complains of Romans acting like grim, grey-headed uncles listening to copies and translations of Lucilius and Homer, and then paints them as an orgasmic audience listening to a morally bankrupt, sexually stimulating poetry reading. Supposedly the grand and crusty poetry typically produced provokes this kind of sexual elation in its audience? It also then portrays Persius as assuming the same grim and serious nature that he was just bemoaning at the beginning of the poem. Instead, I think Persius is creating a much more interesting and comical Foil. Suppose lines 15-23 are instead assigned to the Foil as a response to Persius' dismissive description of grand writing. The "you" in *leges* in line 17 makes more sense, and the *haec* in 15 refers to the very poem being read--a metapoetic joke. Then Persius' new kind of poetry--popular, festive, grotesque--is *producing* these results in his Roman audience. The ranting diatribe criticizing the sexuality of the

verse is in the mouth of Persius' Foil as he attempts to defend official culture in the face of Persius' rejection of it in favor of something new and, frankly, alive:

> P: What for? So Polydamas and the Daughters of Troy don't prefer Labeo to me? What a load. No, if gloomy Rome thinks something's unimportant, don't get into it or try to fix a scale that's off and don't look past yourself. Anyone in Rome, if it's even allowed to say, (but it's not) when I see our gray hair and that sad lifestyle of ours and everything we do after the fun's over, when we sound like wise, old uncles. Then, then--I'm sorry (I don't want ... what should I do here?), but I am pissed--I laugh it up.
>
> We lock ourselves up to write something grand, this guy in verse, that guy prose, for an overinflated lung to blast out ...
>
> F: Oh, sure (*scilicet*). And you, hair all silky and in a fresh toga, dressed in white and--the finishing touch--with your sardonyx birthday ring, you'll read *this* stuff from your high chair, after you've rinsed your loosened throat with its fluent trill, wrecked by a cum-hither look. Then you see lumbering Tituses, not so tight any more, and not soft-spoken when the poems enter the pelvis, when they're tickled deep inside by the vibrating verse ...
>
> P: So you (*tun*), old-timer, put together left-overs for other people's ear-holes, at which even you, an absolute wreck of joints and skin, would say "Whoa there ..."?

Most importantly in this reading of the poem, the orgasmic reaction of Persius' audience is a good thing. Obviously a grotesque exaggeration, but the scene is one of festive, fruitful, sexual joy enjoyed by *Titi*, ordinary Romans.[160] Perfectly appropriate in this context is Nikitinski's (2002: 61) added note "praeterea hoc vocabulo ut videtur plebeio sermone membrum virile tecte designabatur (cf. 'a membri virilis magnitudine dicti titi' Schol.)." This takes us even more deeply into

[160] Harvey (1981: 22-23) follows Casaubon (1695: 57) in reading *Titos* simply as a generic name for "Romans." He notes that some editors read *Titos* as mock heroic, following the scholiast who reads *Titos* as *Titie(nse)s*; so Cowherd (1986: 42). Harvey finds this reading "incredible" however.

the world of popular parlance, outsized body parts, and potent sexuality. Persius allies himself with popular festive culture and with ordinary Romans, not the traditional literary elite, through the ridiculous disapproval of his mock Foil, reduced to a grouchy, disapproving old man--the kind Persius was complaining about a few lines earlier, who wants to stop all the fun and serve up yesterday's poetry.

His Foil's vivid condemnation of the scene is replete with positive, regenerative grotesque imagery. Most obviously, the material bodily principle is at hand in the words *intima* and *lumbum*. Grotesque imagery lives around and below the waist, because that is the center of all things generative (digestion, birth, defecation, etc.). This is the region that Persius' new style of poetry invades and excites to virtual orgasm. Significantly, Persius' poetry, after invading the deepest innards and genitalia of his audience, has the transformative effect of erasing their *mos probus* and their *vox serena*, both descriptions aptly suited to the *canities* and *patrui* that Persius bemoans earlier in the poem. Persius' revolutionary poetry brings the old grey-beards back to shaking, orgasmic life and youth. The material bodily principle is further enforced in this set of lines by taking the heads of both Persius and his audience and degrading them to the lower bodily stratum as well. Persius himself is described as having a *patrans ocellus*, certainly one of the most bizarre pairings of noun and participle in Latin, and a well known *iunctura acris* of the poet. Here Persius' "orgasming little eye" serves to bring the poet's head, his consciousness, his center of learning, down into the region of his waist. His eye is orgasmic, his poetry penetrating. The language is sexual and also promises fertility

and birth. When Persius fires back at his Foil, the old-timer's audience too have their heads relocated below the waist if we accept a pun in the reading of *auriculis* as "asshole ears."[161] The audience is still penetrable, but the combination of the penetrator now being a "little old man" and the penetrated being the asshole instead of the loins makes for what would seem to be an unproductive, ungenerative form of penetration. The penetrability of Persius' audience and the potency of his gaze as he performs result in sexual thrills and, ultimately, a rejuvenation of the mob that is listening.

The traditional take on this passage attributes the outrage to Persius, simultaneously decrying degeneracy in style and in morals. The conflicting ideas of drab old age and stuffiness versus sexual depravity are reconciled by claiming (a never stated) hypocrisy, the "hypocritical severity which was the traditional mask of the pervert," as Bramble (1974: 41-42) says. When Persius laughs, he's not laughing at severity, but at hypocrisy.[162] An assault on indecency certainly takes place in these lines, but we must ask if the assault makes sense in the mouth of Persius and also how seriously and sympathetically we are to respond to the assault. In defense of Persius the moralist-critic, Bramble (1974: 44-45) notes that "sexual overtones load the vocabulary of the critics: *tener, mollis, fractus* ... This patently moralistic

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[161] Brief mention of the possibility of this pun is made in Bramble (1974: 95) to support his characterization of Persius' Foil as pathic poet. Freudenberg (2001: 172-3) expands on the reading of the pun, and grants it more humor and status as a *iunctura acris*, but still essentially reads the image as an indication of moral corruption and a victimized audience. For a rejection of this reading, based especially on vowel length, see La Penna (1995: 286 n.4): "L'opera del Bramble è notevole per competenza ed acume; ma chi potrà credere, per es., che innāta (l, 25) allude a in nate (p. 94) e auriculis (l, 23) ad auri-cūlis (p. 95)?"
[162] Bramble (1974: 71).

terminology often acted as a substitute for rational criticism, as at Quint. xii. 10.12 ... Like Quintilian, Persius relies on foreseeable emotional response to an imagery which, though not conducive to reasoned analysis, was a powerful weapon in satire." So we have Harvey (1981: 45) noting that *tenerum* at line 98 "suggests both blandness and effeminacy," and Dessen (1968: 32): "they use their poetry as they use their bodies, for sexual stimulation, and their poetry reflects their effeminacy." So Persius' language, loaded with sexual overtones, criticizes literature by way of criticizing (sexual) morality (or vice versa in Dessen): "given the static, deterministic Roman view of character, it follows that everything--from physique to literature--reflects fundamental traits of personality: as the man, so the style."[163] To speak of the "Roman view" of character is a bit problematic: does Quintilian speak for all Romans, or even all critics? Does Persius belong side by side with him? An overlooked alternative point of view is available, and one that feels like a much better fit for a poet as revolutionary as Persius. Catullus describes his poetry (or his critics' view of it) in terms similar to those being deployed by Quintilian--and modern apologists for Persius the moralist. Take for example poem 16:

> Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo,
> Aureli pathice et cinaede Furi,
> qui me ex versiculis meis putastis,
> quod sunt molliculi, parum pudicum.
> nam castum esse decet pium poetam
> ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est;
> qui tum denique habent salem ac leporem,
> si sunt molliculi ac parum pudici,
> et quod pruriat incitare possunt,
> non dico pueris, sed his pilosis
> qui duros nequeunt movere lumbos ... (1-11)

[163] Bramble (1974: 58).

> Fuck you, Aurelius and Furius! Suck it
> you punkass cocksuckers.
> You got your ideas about me from my poems
> because they are loose, not too straight.
> It's right for a god-fearing poet to be straight
> himself; it's not at all necessary for his little lays.
> These then, finally, are spicy and sexy
> if they are loose and not too straight
> and can arouse something that tickles.
> I don't mean for the boys, but these goats
> who can't get it up ...

So here, about a century earlier, we have the style-equals-man critique being leveled at poet and poetry; we also have the response of a young, revolutionary poet: fuck off. Turning back to lines 15-21 of Persius, we can with precedent read the morally outraged, but at the same time curiously graphic, tirade about "poetry these days" as coming from the mouth of a moralizing critic, like Furius and Aurelius, who just doesn't get it. Some of the verbal echoes that resonate between these two passages are striking. *Mollis*, noted by Bramble (1974: 44) as a key sexual-critical-moral term, is deployed by Furius and Aurelius in the even more condemnatory diminutive, *molliculi*. The diminutive suffix -*cul*- is deployed by both poets, and in the context of *pathicus* and *pedicare* in Catullus 16 Bramble and Freudenberg's reading of the suffix as an obscene pun serves to amplify the meaning of the word and its sexual connotations. It's worth noting that the opposite of *mollis*, *durus*, is successfully deployed by Catullus to suggest a *lack* of virility when paired with *lumbos*, the same word used by Persius in line 20. Finally, Catullus, like Persius, draws a distinction between youth and playfulness (*pueri*) and the old (*pilosi*). In poem 35, Catullus also uses the word *tener* of a poet, his friend, as a positive:

> Poeta tenero, meo sodali
> velim Caecilio, papyre, dicas

Veronam veniat. (1-3)

To the gentle poet, my brother,
Caecilius, I'd like you to say, papyrus,
"Come to Verona."

The wildly vivid and sexual language of the outraged speaker then takes on a new and comical meaning. Persius' language is grotesque and striking on the poetic level, but on the dramatic level of the dialogue we now see the Foil-critic as the pervert wearing the mask of severity and as the incompetent critic, like Furius and Aurelius, who imply a "style is the man" interpretation of poetry and language. This comparison may have been overlooked since it is often assumed that Persius rejects poets like Catullus, a neoteric, as part of the problem. La Penna (1995: 285-286) is a good example of this: "Il vizio letterario su cui Persio insiste di più, è una mollezza d'immagini e di musica che ha radici nella poesia neoterica del tempo di Catullo ed è profondamente malata di mania ellenizzante, un'arte di insinuazione, di seduzione metretricia." While this antipathy may be genuine, it assumes a univocality to Catullus' poetry that I think is mistaken. Catullus 16 is but one example of a very different type of poetry from the soft, Hellenized type La Penna describes, and I think it is one with which Persius is much in sympathy.[164]

Hooley (1997: 40-41) sees in this passage another conscious echo of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, lines 208-217:

Postquam coepit agros extendere uictor et urbes
latior amplecti murus uinoque diurno
placari Genius festis impune diebus,
accessit numerisque modisque licentia maior ...
Sic priscae motumque et luxuriem addidit arti

[164] Interestingly, Catullus is another poet who uses limping iambs, as Persius does in his Prologue. Catullus uses the meter in eight of his poems.

tibicen traxitque uagus per pulpita uestem;
sic etiam fidibus uoces creuere seueris
et tulit eloquium insolitum facundia praeceps

[After the victorious people began to extend their domain, a wider wall began to surround cities, and after one's Genius began to be appeased by daytime drinking on festal days with no fear of punishment, then greater license came to verse and music ... Thus the flute player added movement and luxury to the old art and dragged long gown behind him as he roamed the stage. Thus new strings were added to the simple harps, and bold fluency brought with it unwonted eloquence.][165]

Here Hooley argues that "Horace focuses on the modern tendency toward salacious vulgarity in performance ... the same emphasis on luxurious dress and gesture, the same domineering license, creeping over art once austere, balanced, and pure--all are evident along with the notable similarity of scene and ambience." Hooley tracks the ongoing allusions throughout Satire 1 to the *Ars Poetica*, ultimately concluding that "what we have seen Persius do with Horace (and the manner of his doing) goes some distance in adumbrating a pattern of responses, focused on the conditions and manners of poetry in the satirist's changed and disturbing world ..."[166] That Persius is engaging with Horace and, specifically, the *Ars Poetica* throughout has been long demonstrated,[167] and that he is commenting on poetry in his world is clear. But ultimately we have the same default idea that Persius must be "satirizing" Neronian society--a "changed and disturbing world." This problematic but unquestioned starting point then dictates interpretation of the specifics of the poem and of

[165] The translation and the excerpting of lines are Hooley's (1997: 40).
[166] Hooley (1997: 62-63).
[167] See Fiske (1913) "Lucilius, the *Ars Poetica* of Horace, and Persius" for a complete gathering of verbal echos and borrowings.

Persius' engagement with Horace. At points, the effort to make sense of this reading is visible. Hooley (1997: 38) suggests the first twelve lines of the poem represent a sort of program within a program, followed by "logical development coherently touching on themes of public inanity, the corresponding triviality of popular verse, and the aesthetic and moral perversity consequent upon degraded contemporary values." But those themes do not develop logically, as seen above, in the traditional reading of the poem with Persius at one point lamenting stuffy old age and the next minute (homo)erotic promiscuity in contemporary poetry. Hooley (1997: 41) later acknowledges that this "scene functions as a composite exemplum of literary vices hypostatized to such a degree that the salient idea at the root of the portrait--the guilty complicity entailed in art's reception in the wider world--is almost lost to sight." If instead, the passage above is read as a debate between Persius and his Foil, it is a good deal more coherent, because the focus is on poetry, not poetry and/as morality. The dialogue also creates an interesting opportunity for Persius and "Horace" to go head-to-head. Persius' new style is a rejection of what Horatian literary values have become, and "Horace" brought into Persius' time, is an old fuddy-duddy railing (ironically, obscenely) against the supposed loose morals of Persius' revolutionary poetry. By choosing a passage from Horace in which Horace rejects modern (to him) innovations in art, Persius has the chance to laughingly portray what Horace has become in his time, a pedantic old school master whose idea of poetic achievement is being recited by schoolboys. The irony here is no doubt intentional, for Persius would have known well that one of the worst fates Horace could predict for himself and his poetry was this: "hoc quoque te manet, ut

pueros elementa docentem/occupet extremis in vicis balba senectus" (this also awaits you: that babbling old age grips you as you teach boys the basics out in the boonies).[168] Even as this dialogue with contemporary "Horace" gets heated, Persius simultaneously, through this allusion, shows what he can do as a new, grotesque reinvention of Horace. Hooley, in his comparison of the two passages, observes that "Persius, in contrast, has invigorated the passage ... Caricature and bold specificity of language are evident devices." This is precisely Persius' grotesque agenda with Horace, a (re-)invigoration of the Horatian project (Hooley, 2007: 89, calls it a deformation) through grotesque devices like caricature and "bold specificity of language" such as obscenity and the trademark "*iuncturae acres*," a phrase itself, as we have seen, in direct dialogue with Horace and the *Ars Poetica*.

The dialogue continues, with Persius voicing the next lines, rather than their usual attribution to the Foil:

> P: Quo didicisse, nisi hoc fermentum et quae semel intus
> innata est rupto iecore exierit caprificus?
> En pallor seniumque! "O mores," usque adeone
> scire tuum nihil est nisi te scire hoc sciat alter?
>
> F: At pulchrum est digito monstrari et dicier "hic est."
> Ten cirratorum centum dictata fuisse
> pro nihilo pendes?' (24-30)
>
> P: What's the point of having learned, if this yeast and the goat-fig that
> was once born deep inside doesn't exit a burst liver?
> Look at the old timers' pallor! "Oh tradition ...," is your
> knowing such a nothing until another knows you know?
>
> F: But it's nice to be pointed at and to be called "the man."
> You don't care at all about some day having been recited by
> a hundred curly-haired boys?

[168] *Epistles* 1.20.

The difference, again, is that here we are drawing a contrast between hidebound and petrifying conformity to the past (*didicisse* for *didicisse's* sake) and the new type of poetry that Persius wants to write, rendered in the grotesque image of a goat-fig bursting through his liver. The image works as grotesque on multiple levels. First, as Harvey (1981: 24) notes, the liver has a "traditional association with the lower passions." In Harvey's reading of this poem, these lines are delivered by the Foil, and the liver's association with lower passions is a "consideration ... relevant to a pathic's poetry." But the organs of the abdomen and the "lower passions" are where the grotesque lives, and from that point of view, from that aesthetic, the lower passions are generative and ultimately positive. The incongruity of a "pathic" simultaneously excited about learning and about having his poetry of low passions being recited by schoolboys is unacceptable. The Foil favors old-fashioned values and poetry suitable for school texts, while Persius, not worried about his audience, revels in his new poetry of (low) passion. The fig tree that bursts through that liver, as is commonly pointed out to little purpose in commentaries,[169] is famous for its ability to grow in rock and to actually burst through it with its roots and growth. This is an ideal image in this case, suggesting an almost impossible yet irresistible burst of generative force in the form of his poetry. The rock? The layers of learning, the literary giants that bury and petrify poetic inspiration and motivation as they become the end rather than the beginning. I think it is telling that Persius chooses a perfect infinitive, *didicisse*, for "learning." The process is over, complete. There is no growth possible and, implicitly, learning is capable of stifling new growth. His own

[169] Dessen (1968: 36); Harvey (1981: 25); Braund (2004: 50).

liver could become petrified. Cynthia Dessen (1996: 36) has pointed out that the fig is a sterile plant, and uses this fact to interpret these lines when voiced by the Foil. But here the fig is clearly being used for its rock-breaking ability first and foremost; this is supported by the participle *rupto* used in the next line. Images from the popular-festive grotesque are called into play here as well. The fig may well be a sterile plant if you are a botanist, but the fig is commonly used in obscene expressions and hand gestures as an image of female genitalia[170] or of phallic penetration of female genitalia (Figure 7). This is one of the central anatomical images of the grotesque's material bodily principle: it promises birth and life from and opposed to death, just as the fruit-bearing tree bursts from the sterile rock, just as this new grotesque poetry bursts from the poet's once petrified liver. Another interesting spin on the fig's supposed sterility can be found in Pliny:

> caprificus vocatur e silvestri genere ficus numquam maturescens, sed quod ipsa non habet alii tribuens, quoniam est naturalis causarum transitus aeque ut e putrescentibus generatur aliquid. ergo culices parit, hi fraudati alimento in matre e putri eius tabe ad cognatam evolant, morsuque ficorum crebro, hoc est avidiore pastu, aperientes ora earum atque ita penetrantes intus solem primo secum inducunt cerialesque auras inmittunt foribus adapertis.
>
> Pliny, *Natural History* 15.21

> A wild-growing kind of fig is called the goat-fig; it never ripens, but it gives to another what it does not have itself, since this is a natural progression of causes the same as when something is born from something decaying. Therefore it produces gnats; these, robbed of food in their mother, fly out

[170] Hamilton (2002: 279-280). The gesture lasts many centuries in Italian culture as the *mano-in-fica* and then to *far le fiche.* Demure early Christians referred to the gesture as *manus obscena*. Like many obscene gestures, this one had apotropaic power as well: the *mano fico* sign was used in the ritual of the *Lemuria* as part of the attempt to ward off evil spirits of the dead. As a popular symbol indicating genitalia and fertility, it was particularly suited to countering the dead (Adkins, 1994: 284).

> of its decaying rot to its sister-tree, and by constant biting of the figs, i.e. by feeding too greedily, opening up their orifices and penetrating so deep they bring the sunshine inside with them for the first time and send in ripening air once the passages are opened.

Here we have a near-perfect grotesque metaphor, with the learning of the past simultaneously in sterile decay, death, and in the moment of producing new life. The imagery of the fig itself is enhanced by the penetration of the gnats, and the grotesque nature of the imagery is further developed by the over-indulgent eating, the feasting of the insects, that furthers the process of ripening and birth. It's a learned metaphor, but a lively, vivid and grotesque one as well, one which well suits Persius' grotesque style.

This interpretation of the fig is supported by the other metaphor Persius uses for his poetry, *fermentum*, the transference of which "to the figurative sphere is novel," according to Harvey (1981: 24). The word is telling and, like the fig imagery above, conforms perfectly to the liminal, transitional nature of the grotesque: key to this system of imagery is the idea of bodies and material being seen at a point of becoming; there is a transitioning meant to represent the move from death to life. Fermentation literally involves the rotting and decomposition of matter to produce the sweet (and sometimes intoxicating) new product, most commonly, wine or bread, the two staples of a Roman meal.

Persius' angry exclamation then focuses on the problem with today's poetry: old age and pallor. The old, in the form of a dogmatic adherence to "official," traditional culture and a retread of what's been taught in school for decades, has been his consistent target in both the earlier lines of this poem and in the prologue.

The pallor is the result of staying home and doing too much bookish study of these old forms; it indicates sickness and withered strength. Persius wants a vivid, new, invigorated poetry in place of the enervated imitations of the old. If the only way to be "known," that is, accepted by the elite critics and the wealthy patrons of today's poetry, is to write learned, tired poetry, then he won't be known. It's worth noting again that Persius' imagined audience above is a group of *Titos*--everyday Romans. His Foil's question proves the point: if Persius would write poetry conforming to the norm, he would end up being a school text; he would become part of "official," traditional culture and be learned by rote by schoolboys instead of inspiring the orgasmic joy in the streets as imagined above.

Persius' description of an after-dinner poetry reading (lines 30-40) makes it clear that "being known" by the critical elite is a sterile kind of death for a poet like him:

> Ecce inter pocula quaerunt
> Romulidae saturi quid dia poemata narrent.
> Hic aliquis, cui circum umeros hyacinthina laena est,
> rancidulum quiddam balba de nare locutus
> Phyllidas, Hypsipylas, vatum et plorabile siquid,
> eliquat ac tenero subplantat verba palato.
> Adsensere viri: nunc non cinis ille poetae
> felix? Non levior cippus nunc inprimit ossa?
> Laudant convivae: nunc non e manibus illis,
> nunc non e tumulo fortunataque favilla
> nascentur violae?
>
> Look here! After they've had a few
> the stuffed Sons of Romulus ask what poetry on high has to say.
> One of them, a pretty blue wrap is around his shoulders,
> says some rancid little thing in a lisping, nasal voice--
> he dribbles Phyllises, Hypsipyles,
> something from the true poets that makes you want to cry,
> and the words tippy-toe from his delicate mouth.
> The men nod their approval. Now is that poet's ash

> happy? Doesn't the tombstone press more lightly on his bones?
> The partiers are clapping; now from those ghosts,
> now from the tomb and that lucky little pile of ash
> violets are growing, right?

The partygoers are *Romulidae*, indicating a social status that Persius' *Titi* above do not hold. Bramble (1974: 101) reads the use of *Romulidae* as critical and ironic: "the sons of Romulus are a disgrace to their origins." *Romulidae* need not be loaded in this way, and Bramble's reading here is colored by his need to read Persius as the angry moralist who wishes for the old days. On the other hand, *Romulidae* works as mockingly old-fashioned without necessarily carrying with it a longing for the past. The *Romulidae* are simply stuffy and pretentious, cultivating their old-fashioned and outdated tastes in poetry.

It is worth noting that there is no actual poet present at this dinner of the cultured elite. One of their own is reciting poetry (cf. the Foil's question about school texts above) apparently written by a dead poet. This is old-school stuff, the work of *vates*, and it's grim. The scene is nothing like the poetry reading above, orgasmic and joyful, where the poet's verse *penetrates* the Tituses right there in the street: there's no vigor (and certainly no joy) in the poetry; it's *plorabile* (line 34), a pun indicating both the subject matter (weepy stuff) and the quality of the poetry (deplorable). Though this poet rates the approval of the dinner guests, that approval is sterile: the poet is dead (lines 36ff), and, unlike the fertile grotesque world that produces life from death, nothing grows from the tomb of the poet. All is ash, bone, stone where no flowers grow and the tombstone presses down (lines 37-40).

At this point, the Foil breaks in, indicating what seems to be very often ignored in Persius: the poet is laughing (*rides* line 40). His description of the elite dinner party is not an angry moralistic tirade, but a piece of scathing laughter aimed at the old-fashioned elite who lack self-awareness and any understanding of good poetry. The Sons of Romulus may be stuffed (*saturi* line 31) from their dinner, but the word is also a playful reminder that we are reading satire, something meant to be funny. There may also be at work here a pun on satyrs, creating a mock-heroic scene in which the little grotesque satyrs ape noble or heroic behavior to deflating comic effect. The easy-to-overlook *ait* here is Persius' set up for breaking the illusion of an actual Foil four lines later. Persius inserts a meta-poetic joke immediately after his assertion of laughter.

Following *rides*, the Foil says at lines 40-41, "nimis uncis/naribus indulges" (you're thumbing your nose a little too freely). In grotesque imagery, the nose is always phallic,[171] and generally enlarged for the purpose of humor and the suggestion of fertility. The Foil's protest that Persius "is indulging too much" in his literally "hooked nose" is a wonderful grotesque (and untranslatable) pun. Persius' "nose" is potent, and he uses it early and often. Persius' poetry originates below the waist, where good grotesque art always should. Noses appear twice more as the source of poetry in this poem. Later Horace (116-118), as discussed above, is depicted as "hanging the people from his cleaned out (blown) nose." Again, to

[171] Bakhtin (1965/1984) 316: "... the grotesque image of the nose ... always symbolizes the phallus." Bakhtin goes on to reference Joubert's *Erreurs populaires et propos vulgaires touchant la médecine et le régime de santé*, noting that in popular belief the "potency of the genital organs can be inferred from the dimensions and form of the nose."

enhance the innately phallic nature of the image of the nose, Persius adds a little naughty joke. *Excusso* is an unusual pairing with *naso* here. Commentaries suggest that the term implies shrewdness[172] and the ability to make better critical judgments.[173] But given the phallic imagery of the nose there is also the comic suggestion of obscene gestures and masturbation as poets shake out their "noses" at people. Horace did what Persius has just been accused of doing. It's important not to confuse Persius' admiration for Horace here with the subservient study and mimicry of the poets Persius despises. Persius admires what Horace did, but needs poetry to reinvent itself (just as Horace reinvented it in his time). In the hands of the dinner-party poetasters, Horace (and all old-school poetry) is dead, fruitless, and enervated. Another meaning for the participle *excussus* is "vigorous, violent."[174] So, on the one hand, we have noses "shaken out" and full of power and aggression, suggesting all kinds of potency.

On the other hand, our third nasal appearance rings differently from these two. The Romulid who recites at the dinner party does so through his *balba naris*. Another interesting adjective, and another *iunctura acris* paired with the nose, *balba* is generally translated as stuttering or lisping. But here, applied to the nose and, by extension, the phallus, we have a dick that's not up to the job--the man can't keep it up,[175] and his enervated penis is emblematic of the kind of limp, fruitless poetry we expect from this crowd.

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[172] Harvey (1981: 50).
[173] Cowherd (1986: 58).
[174] TLL vol. 5^2, 1314.5
[175] The stuttering or stammering implied by *balbus* when it refers to speech cannot, I think, be repurposed positively for any kind of rhythmic or up and down motion.

It's tempting to see Persius taking a shot at an actual poet here, a young Valerius Flaccus. Flaccus' full name includes the cognomen Balbus, and that word in such close juxtaposition with Hypsipyle, one of the stars of Flaccus' *Argonautica*, makes the joke a plausible one. Punning on *cognomina* had already been done in Roman satire, with a parallel example detectable in Horace. In Satire 1.3.43-48 Horace speaks of how, out of friendship, we gloss over one another's faults:

> at pater ut gnati, sic nos debemus amici
> si quod sit vitium non fastidire, **strabonem**
> appellat **paetum** pater, et **pullum**, male parvus
> si cui filius est, ut abortivus fuit olim
> Sisyphus; hunc **varum** distortis cruribus, illum
> balbutit **scaurum** pravis fultum male talis.
>
> But like a father with his son we shouldn't
> find fault with a friend if there's some flaw. "Blinky,"
> a father calls his squinting son, and "lil chick" if he has
> a puny little son like the premie Sisyphus was;
> he coos "weeble" at the one with twisted legs
> and "wobbles" at the club-foot with the crooked ankles.

The adjectives bolded in the passage above all also happen to be the *cognomina* of leading Roman aristocratic families, and Hooley (2007: 44-45) has observed that most likely Horace is making a "sly glance to *his* audience: this is how *we* see our families and friends."

Certainly the date is about a decade early for Flaccus, who flourished under Vespasian rather than Nero, but that wouldn't negate the possibility that a young Valerius Flaccus was already making the rounds and courting the more traditionally

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The word is always deployed for starting and stopping, halting speech. To compound the negative imagery, Horace writes of *balba senectus* (*Ep*. 1.20.18). It is interesting that the context of this use of the word is Horace's address to his book, whose doom he predicts in the form of being used as a school text.

minded elite with the beginnings of his *Argonautica*, exactly the kind of polished, learned work that the Neronian grotesque satirists are opposed to. It adds a nice additional level to the scene, though the message is the same regardless.

Another reading of this passage in Persius is suggestive of his theme of clinging to the old, Augustan poets. All of these nasal references here could be a pun on Ovid's name, Naso, and the subjects of this poetry recitation, Hypsipyle and Phyllis, both get their own treatment in Ovid's *Heroides.*[176] Ovid arguably was the next step after Horace in the Augustan project of refinement of verse, so an actual reading of Ovid might be referenced here. Bramble (1974: 104) notes that "Phyllidas and Hypsipylas, with their dulcet and effeminate 'Y' sounds bring to mind the mincing, professionally inconsolable heroines of the Ovidian type." Though Bramble's prejudice in reading everything as a condemnation of passive homosexuality perhaps colors the statement, clearly Ovid is likely to spring to mind with the reading of these lines. Harvey (1981: 27) does not feel that Ovid himself is in Persius' mind, but rather that "specimens of poetry cited at 93-5 and 99-102 suggest a continuation of Ovidian practices" that Persius targets for mockery. Ovid was a latecomer to the Augustan literary project, and it's conceivable that Persius looked on him as the beginning of the obsession over refined style that he rejects. This reading is also consistent with the idea that Augustan poets themselves need not be the target of Persius' mockery, but rather their descendants and imitators. In support of this being a reading of Ovid himself as the butt of the nose jokes, the

[176] Korfmacher (1933: 280) feels that these references are simply part of Persius' larger interest in rejecting Greek language and particularly Alexandrine intrusions into Latin literature. Persius, for the record, does use Greek words on occasion: e.g. *antithetis* in 1.86 and *gausape* in 4.37.

subject matter itself and the final lines mentioned above are reminiscent of Ovid's exilic verse epitaph for himself at *Tristia* 3.3.76: "Nasonis molliter ossa cubent" (may Naso's bones rest lightly).

Persius won't compromise his poetry for patrician recognition. He admits to wanting praise, just as anyone does, but not the praise of *this* crowd. Again, he targets the same crowd and the same type of poetry. Attius Labeo's *Iliad* returns in line 50 as praiseworthy to the elite, just as it was in line 4. Here it is drunk on hellebore, again one of Persius' telling *iuncturae acres*. *Ebria* in the popular-festive spectrum should be a good thing: it sparks conviviality and laughter. It suggests a party, the kind of wild energy Persius admires, the product of the *fermentum* in his own liver. But here the drunkenness is cancelled by the drink: hellebore, as a medicine used to treat insanity, is the antidote to the kind of ecstatic poetic experience Persius champions. Attius' *Iliad* is part of the problem, killing the conviviality and laughter that should result from poetry just as the *plorabile poema* does at the dinner party a few lines earlier. Again, the problem is bookish imitation of past greats and its admiration by the grey-headed *patrui*. Persius also includes some elegiac poetry: "non siqua elegidia crudi/dictarunt proceres?" (*whatever elegies belching aristocrats are repeating?*) at lines 51-52. This is read as aristocratic dabbling in poetry. But the verb here is the same one used in line 29 when talking of schoolboys reciting from a learned text, and here this would echo the dinner party scene of enervated fascination with dead poets and admiration for their imitators. The lords here are reciting someone else's poetry. This stuff ruins a good feast: in line 51 we have drunkenness cured by medicine (Attius' *Iliad*) and elegiac poetry

causing indigestion for the *proceres*. The poetic feasting is spoiled by the bad poetry.

Again, Persius targets aristocratic taste in poetry in lines 53-62 with his next assault, much more in the line of low-brow mockery--part and parcel of the grotesque--than anything that has come before (with the possible ironic exception of his Foil's attack on his poetry reading):

> Calidum scis ponere sumen,
> scis comitem horridulum trita donare lacerna,
> et 'verum' inquis 'amo, verum mihi dicite de me.'
> Qui pote? Vis dicam? Nugaris, cum tibi, calve,
> pinguis aqualiculus propenso sesquipede extet.
> O Iane, a tergo quem nulla ciconia pinsit
> nec manus auriculas imitari mobilis albas
> nec linguae quantum sitiat canis Apula tantae.
> Vos, o patricius sanguis, quos vivere fas est
> occipiti caeco, posticae occurrite sannae.
>
> You know how to set out a piping hot sow's udder,
> you know how to gift a shivering follower with a worn-out coat
> and you say, "The truth--I love it. Tell me the truth about me."
> Who could? You want me to? You're a joke, baldy, 'cause your
> big-ass fat tub sticks out a foot and a half.
> Lucky you, Janus, no one ever hit you with the bird
> or hands waving like an ass's ears
> or a tongue like a dog's in the desert.
> Blue bloods--it's right that you don't have
> eyes in the back of your head--face the sneering behind.

There is an immediate temptation to look ahead to Juvenal and to liken this passage to his depiction of clients and patrons at dinner in his fifth satire. But there the patron is stingy with his clients' dinner. While he dines on rich meats and truffles, the client gets nothing but the privilege of watching the carver in action. Earlier the differentiated dining has featured similar foods of far different qualities. Juvenal's tone is bitter, resigned, beaten down:

ipsi pauca uelim, facilem si praebeat aurem.
nemo petit modicis quae mittebantur amicis
a Seneca, quae Piso bonus, quae Cotta solebat
largiri; namque et titulis et fascibus olim
maior habebatur donandi gloria. solum
poscimus ut cenes ciuiliter. hoc face et esto,
esto, ut nunc multi, diues tibi, pauper amicis.

I'd like a word or two with The Man, if he would offer a ready ear.
nobody's looking for what used to be sent to their humble friends
by Seneca, what good Piso and what Cotta used
to hand out (back in the day more than titles and badges
the glory of giving was prized). We're just asking you
to eat with us like we're people. Do this and go ahead,
really, be extravagant with yourself, cheap with your friends, as many
now do.

There are some big differences between these two passages. In Persius, the quality of the food isn't in doubt, and there's no hint of differentiated dining. Persius' patron's gift isn't great, but Juvenal isn't even asking for gifts anymore, not like the ones they gave in the good old (Neronian, by the way) days. Juvenal himself in his word with the patron never manages to lose his obvious inferior status, and his plea that the patron dine with his clients *civiliter* highlights the disparity in status.

In contrast, Persius' painting of a patron serving up hot sow's udder, distributing gifts, asking for the truth and getting more than he expected (but just what he asked for!) has the ring of Saturnalian pranking here. The *comitem* (line 54) is clearly of inferior status, yet his superior is serving up what is generally considered to be a luxury item for dinner.[177] The stage is set for the truth, however, by his not-so-great gift of a worn-out cloak. He asks for the truth and, perhaps contrary to the patron's expectation, Persius is all too happy to oblige. What's the

[177] Harvey (1981: 31); Gowers (1993: 260-261), citing Martial primarily as evidence.

real dynamic here? If we are to see this aristocrat as truly mean in his raggedy gift, why does Persius add the detail of the sow's udder, rich fare worthy of a feast? I would suggest that the cloak and Persius' not-too-grateful remarks are on one level all in the mode of Saturnalian pranks and license, along the lines of Catullus' address to his friend for a bad Saturnalia gift at Catullus 14, replete with mock hatred and cursing. The combination of feasting, prank gift-giving and class-shattering license recall the spirit of Saturnalia. Looking ahead to lines 96-97, we will see the combination of something *pinguis* and something old again, used metaphorically of the kind of literature that Persius objects to--imitations of classics embellished by a rich (fatty?) embellishment of style.

The physical caricaturing of the patron, toting his gigantic belly, is pure grotesque. The unusual[178] *aqualiculus* is also striking: a belly the size of a washbasin, perhaps, or a comparison on some level to a pig. Bramble (1974: 111-112) sees a connection between *sumen* in line 53 and *aqualiculus*, noting that in Isidore[179] the word is used properly of a pig's belly and that consequently "the patron is no higher than an animal." Again, Bramble's own reading of *-cul-* as an obscene pun may be at play here (this is strengthened by the recurrence of the word he originally identifies, *auriculas*, two lines later): this tubby lord has a big-ass belly. This serves to compound the grotesque imagery, as both the ass and the belly reside in the lower, grotesque spectrum of the body. The word also plays with the notion

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[178] TLL vol. 2, 365.62ff. Harvey (1981: 32) notes that only in this passage is the noun "attested with certainty ... before ecclesiastical Latin." The noun seems to be related to *aqualis*, refering to water vessels. Hence Freudenberg (2001: 174) translates it as "fat little water jug."
[179] *Etymology* 11.1.36.

of coming and going and front and back. Persius mockingly bemoans the fact that the patron doesn't have two faces so that he can see behind him, but he *does* have two asses!

Baldness too is often the target of low-brow humor, "a surefire prompt to laughter in the Roman world," as Beard (2014: 165) points out. One example among several that she uses is the famous anecdote about Julius Caesar's triumph.[180] Among the bawdy jokes and songs that Caesar's soldiers--commoners--sing is a rhyme about Caesar as the "bald adulterer." It's low humor directed at another blue-blood, and it gives this passage the flavor of street-level laughter. The crude insults are given even more of a grotesque, marketplace quality by the inclusion of mocking hand gestures and funny-faces, all imitative of animals (stork, donkey, dog). Persius' humor here is imitative of the low-brow and raucous, his target a man of patrician blood. It's all festive license.

This grotesque tour-de-force comes immediately after Persius' derisive portrayal of the aristocratic taste for poetry. Implicitly when the patron asks for "the truth" he is asking for praise for his poetry.[181] The truth that Persius gives him doesn't mention his poetry but instead targets the man. However, the critique is in Persius' own style: I'll tell you the truth about you and, in so doing, I'll show you--and everyone--the truth about your poetry. This grotesque caricature of the

[180] Suetonius, *Life of the Deified Julius* 51, "Urbani, servate uxores: moechum calvom adducimus./Aurum in Gallia effutuisti, hic sumpsisti mutuum" (citizens, watch your wives: we're bringing in the bald adulterer. The gold you fucked away in Gaul you got here on loan).
[181] See Bramble (1974: 110-112).

aristocrat is itself programmatic as Persius gives a full demonstration of what grotesque poetry can do in response to the patron's request for a critical evaluation.

Persius consistently singles out aristocrats for his derision in this poem. The humor and the sympathy lie with the commoner in the marketplace, with the people. This is typical of popular-festive humor and the grotesque, but it's not indicative of any real populist agenda. Persius is appropriating popular language, gesture, and imagery to invigorate his poetry. He wants an artistic revolution, as Nero does, and the program for that revolution is the grotesque. Persius isn't writing for the common man; he's utilizing the common man's imagery to refresh aristocratic art forms that are exhausted and played out. Persius makes the distinction plain in the last lines of his poem:

> Inde vaporata lector mihi ferveat aure,
> non hic qui in crepidas Graiorum ludere gestit
> sordidus et lusco qui possit dicere "lusce,"
> sese aliquem credens Italo quod honore supinus
> fregerit heminas Arreti aedilis iniquas,
> nec qui abaco numeros et secto in pulvere metas
> scit risisse vafer, multum gaudere paratus
> si cynico barbam petulans nonaria vellat.
>
> I want my reader to be on fire, with his ears steam cleaned after that;[182]
> not this oaf who's itching to make fun of Greek sandals
> and could say "hey, one-eye" to a man with one eye,
> lying around thinking he's somebody because, proud of himself
> thanks to some local honors, he broke up some small-time scam as aedile in Aretium;
> and not the oh-so-clever guy who has the know-how to make fun of a basic math class, ready to really enjoy it if some mouthy tramp yanks a Cynic's beard.

[182] i.e. reading Old Comedy and Persius' own poetry (lines 123-5).

Persius' use of popular festive imagery and humor, of insult and the grotesque, is an aesthetic movement meant for a select few, not the common mob. There is a difference between the sophisticated, grotesque poetry that he is creating and the lame and obvious insult of someone *sordidus* or *vafer.* Persius' audience is a literary elite--a *new* literary elite--interested in reinvigorating art through popular forms.

That Persius' interest in marketplace language and imagery is part of an aesthetic, that he means to use it to reinvigorate poetry and act as a course correction, is clear in the discussion with his Foil that follows his condemnation of aristocratic poetry readings too (lines 63ff). Modern poetry has achieved smoothness. The image he uses of the fingernail gliding over the joints is a sculptural one and carries a lot of freight with it. Even as Nero and co. were revitalizing interior decoration by an appropriation of popular visual imagery and a rejection of "official" decor, so too he and the artists around him were experimenting with a similar approach in literature. Writing about Seneca's tragedies, Varner (2000: 119) sees a link between the poetic imagery and the art that surrounded its composer, performers, and audience: "Seneca's fascination with, and literary exploration of, the grotesque finds direct visual correspondences in the art of the Neronian period." The link is there, and I believe Varner's comment can be more widely applied to other Neronian poets, including our satirists. But Varner misses an essential element of the Neronian grotesque: its confrontation with the "official culture" established by Augustus and his various artists that has become dogma and tradition. Horace used the same image positively in his own programmatic satire, and Persius is clearly alluding to that. The interesting thing is

that Horace, of course, was aspiring to this kind of smoothness; *his* reinvention of satire was a program of polishing, perfecting. At the time it was a revolution. Eighty years later, the revolution is over, the smoothness has been taken to extremes, and the artistic movement begun by Horace and the Augustan poets has lost its vitality. Persius, with his *iuncturae acres,* street language, and popular imagery, is starting over again. He knows the past, values it as something to build and grow from, can allude to it, but always will do so in a vital and new way. The past is the stone that his liver's fig tree breaks apart; it's the barrenness of the fig tree that provides new growth and fresh fruit from its putrefaction.

Again, all of the criticism in these lines is typically assigned to Persius, and the result is similar to the earlier passage on poetry. Persius the critic is a bit muddled in terms of what he's criticizing, confusing, conflating, and compounding stodgy antiquarianism with effeminate sexuality:

> Quis populi sermo est? Quis enim nisi carmina molli
> nunc demum numero fluere, ut per leue seueros
> effundat iunctura unguis? Scit tendere uersum
> non secus ac si oculo rubricam derigat uno.
> Sive opus in mores, in luxum, in prandia regum
> dicere, res grandes nostro dat Musa poetae.'
> Ecce modo heroas sensus adferre docemus
> nugari solitos Graece, nec ponere lucum
> artifices nec rus saturum laudare, ubi corbes
> et focus et porci et fumosa Palilia feno,
> unde Remus sulcoque terens dentalia, Quinti,
> cum trepida ante boves dictatorem induit uxor
> et tua aratra domum lictor tulit—euge poeta!
> Est nunc Brisaei quem venosus liber Acci,
> sunt quos Pacuviusque et verrucosa moretur
> Antiopa "aerumnis cor luctificabile fulta?"
> Hos pueris monitus patres infundere lippos
> cum videas, quaerisne unde haec sartago loquendi
> venerit in linguas, unde istud dedecus in quo
> trossulus exultat tibi per subsellia leuis?

Nilne pudet capiti non posse pericula cano
pellere quin tepidum hoc optes audire "decenter"?
"Fur es" ait Pedio. Pedius quid? Crimina rasis
librat in antithetis, doctas posuisse figuras
laudatur: "bellum hoc." hoc bellum? An, Romule, ceves?
Men moveat? Quippe, et, cantet si naufragus, assem
protulerim? Cantas, cum fracta te in trabe pictum
ex umero portes? Verum nec nocte paratum
plorabit qui me volet incurvasse querella.
Sed numeris decor est et iunctura addita crudis.

What do you think? That poetry now at last flows with smooth rhythm, so that critical fingernails glide smoothly over the joins. The modern poet knows how to make a line as straight as if he were stretching a plumb line with one eye closed. Whether his project is to speak against morality, luxury, or the banquets of lords, the Muse provides our poet with grand material. Look! We're now teaching people who used to dabble in Greek doggerel to produce heroic sentiments, people not skillful enough to depict a grove or to praise the plentiful countryside, with its baskets, hearth, pigs, and the smoky hay of Pales' festival—the home of Remus, and yours too, Cincinnatus, polishing your plough beam in the furrow, with your flustered wife dressing you as Dictator in front of the oxen, and the lictor carrying home your plough. Bravo, you poet! These days one person lingers over the varicose tome of Brisaean Accius and more than one over Pacuvius and his warty Antiope, "her melancholy heart besieged by troubles." When you see runny-eyed fathers pouring advice like this into their sons, need you ask the origin of this stew-up of language that's got into their tongues, of that outrageous stuff which puts your young cavaliers in an ecstatic frenzy along the benches? Doesn't it embarrass you that you can't defend some grizzled head from threats without wanting to hear this lukewarm "Nice!"? "You're a thief," someone says to Pedius. What does Pedius say? He balances the accusations in smooth-shaven antitheses and is praised for composing clever expressions: "That's lovely." "That—lovely? Are you wiggling your arse, Romulus? Am I going to be impressed, I'd like to know, and am I going to part with a penny if a shipwreck victim sings a song? Are you singing with a picture of yourself in a shattered ship on your shoulder? The person who wants to bend me with his sorry tale will utter a genuine lament, not one concocted overnight.[183]

It's interesting to note the subject matter that these poets have: they speak "against morality, luxury, or the banquets of lords" (*in mores, in luxum, in prandia*). Ironically,

[183] Translation Braund (2004: 55-57).

this grim stuff against which Persius is supposed to be railing is generally considered to be his own subject matter by critics such as Dessen (1968: 24), espousing the "style makes the man" interpretation of this poem: "Nero's outrageous behavior accelerated the already rapid decay of morals while his philhellenism provoked a corresponding decline in literature." The kind of writing commonly attributed to Persius is, in this passage, exactly the kind of writing he can't stand. Throughout the traditional reading of this satire, coherence is scrambled to make the reading of Persius as "satirist" of Neronian society and *mores* fit. The passage above, in which Persius objects to poetry addressing the decline that Dessen describes, indicates that Persius is *not* this kind of satirist.

What's missing from these poets is the vitality and the laughter, and very often laughter is left out of the critical equation of Persius himself. Persius' laughter, he has told us already, is irrepressible. The characterization of him as an outsider satirist railing against the times, pathic poets, and effete philhellenism[184] fits the hardwiring about "satire" and Nero, but it doesn't seem to really fit what's going on here. Instead, reading Persius as an advocate for new, lively poetry (since he is, in fact, writing that way) makes a lot more sense.

Persius, after he criticizes moralizing, old-fashioned poetry, then goes on to show us (his version of) the type of moral exempla his opponent enjoys, and does it

[184] Running counter to the usual critics and commentators, Witke (1984: 805) makes the intereseting point that "Cornutus' group could not but approve of Nero's philhellenism. Cornutus himself wrote in Greek, as did the two associates of Persius mentioned in the *Vita*, the Lacedemonian doctor Claudius Agathurnus or Agathinus and Petronius Aristocratis Magnes."

in grotesque style: Cincinnatus, one apparently popular topic of these antiquarian poets, is brought low and comical in grotesque style by Persius, who emphasizes his status as a simple farmer. The image of his wife fussing over him as she dresses him out in the fields with oxen looking on is comical, not moralizing, as is the image of a lictor lugging a plough instead of his rod and axes. This kind of inverted imagery and parody is typical of popular-festive humor, and Persius serves it up here as tonic to the enervated imitators and studiers of Accius and Pacuvius. Persius wants poetry to get out of the library and into the streets. Dessen (1968: 28) reads this passage as Persius urging "the poets to turn to their own history, to the stories of Remus and Cincinnatus, for inspiration, and he reminds the aristocrats of their heritage ..." Persius' concern is not subject matter, nor is it "contemporary *mores*." For Persius, consistently, slavish imitation of the past is the source of enervation. His concern in this poem is a literary one.

Another redistribution of lines throughout this passage serves to crystalize Persius' objections and to turn this passage from an undisciplined and self-contradictory rant into a real debate about the aesthetics of poetry that is traditional and Persius' new, grotesque style:

> F: What does popular opinion say?
> P: What else? Poems finally flow now with a soft rhythm, so you can run your critical fingers over the joints without a bump.
> F. We do know how to draw out a line nice and straight, like we're aiming with one eye and stretching a carpenter's line. Whether it's a piece speaking against corrupt morals, against luxury, against regal luncheons, the Muse gives our poet grand material.
> P: There! That's how we keep teaching people used to messing around in Greek to produce heroic tear-jerkers, not artistic enough to compose a poem about a grove or to sing the praises of the hodge-podge countryside where there're baskets and fireplaces, and pigs, and Harvest Day with the smoking hay; Where Remus is from and you,

> Cincinnatus, when your jittery wife dressed you up as dictator in front of your cows and a lictor brought home your plough--nice work, poet! Is it Accius' varicose *Dionysus*,[185] that keeps one busy now, Pacuvius and his warty *Antiope* the others: "her lamentificatory heart pressed by afflictions ...?"
> F: When you see bleary-eyed nobles filling the boys with this kind of advice do you have to ask where this mish-mash of speech came into their mouths from, or that inappropriate material at which the princelings go wild in their seats?
> P: Don't you feel bad that you can't defend some gray-beard and not hope to hear that lukewarm "pretty good?" "You're a thief," someone says to Pedius. And Pedius? He answers the charges in perfectly balanced, smooth antitheses, gets praised for composing learned turns-of-phrase: "That was beautiful." Beautiful? That?
> F: OK, Romulus, you shaking your ass? Do I care? If a shipwrecked sailor sings, I give him some change, right?
> P: Do you sing while carrying a picture of yourself on a broken-up boat? The man who wants me to turn around and listen to his sad tale will cry about something real, not made up at night.
> F: But polish and smoothness have been added to the rough old verses. (63-92)

Reading the lines this way focuses Persius' objections not on subject matter or morality, as most commentators and critics would have, but again exclusively on poetry and his objections to antiquarianism and overly refined language and versification. It's important that the list of poetic topics in this passage are the exact opposite of what would fit the standard line of criticism on Persius: the subject matter is very moral (protests against luxury and other vices) and very Roman (as opposed to the "Hellenizing" that Persius is supposedly opposed to and satirizing). This passage serves to clarify Persius' objections to contemporary poetry and to remove the issue of morality from the table. The problem, as earlier in the poem, is with style.

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[185] For *Brisaei* indicating a Dionysiac play, see Harvey (1981: 38).

By focusing on style over morality, the next section, in which there is a sudden shift to oratory from poetry and then to shipwrecked sailors, makes more sense. The stylistic issues are consistent. Persius has just concluded his tirade on smooth, polished, well-balanced insincerities like Pedius' unemotional and polished defense against charges of thievery. The implication? He should be angry about the charges--he should speak with genuine emotion and, perhaps, something a little more visceral than smooth-shaved, balanced retorts. There is no emotion in this debate, nor any substance. The emphasis for Pedius and everyone else is the perfection of the diction. The debate between Persius and his Foil then moves on to a shipwrecked sailor singing his lament on the street.

Commentators gloss this passage without much attention to the abrupt shift, generally attributing all of the lines to Persius. Harvey (1981: 42) for example simply asserts that "the analogy (to Pedius' oratory) is completed in a surprising manner: P. indignantly accosts the shipwreck, a purely analogical figure." He continues with uncertainty, noting that "the harangue against the beggar is presumably designed to reflect on Pedius but it nevertheless focuses undue attention on a merely illustrative character, who is brought disconcertingly to life." The key here, though, in a reading of this passage as stylistic debate, is the issue of quality of language. The Foil likens the kind of language Persius espouses to the language of a down-on-his-luck sailor. It is his retort, like his earlier (and nastier) *Romule, ceves*? at line 87 to Persius' consistent criticism of style. It's inaccurate, but it's the kind of objection to be expected against the use of street language and grotesque imagery in poetry on the level that Persius uses it, just as *ceves* serves as a

warped view of what Persius is trying to do with his new style and recalls the Foil's earlier moraler-than-thou pornographic rant. It makes sense then to make the next lines Persius' retort. If Persius is a shipwrecked sailor singin' the blues, the kind of language the Foil espouses is worse because it is artificial. The shipwreck isn't real, it's a painting, and the sailor is now just a fraud. His language is made up, not real, and his lament lacks vitality and produces no effect in Persius. In the other corner, Persius' Foil levels charges of obscenity and low-class language at the grotesque poet.

The Foil protests that what's been added to the old is smoothness of form. His use of the word *iunctura*, repeated from line 65, warrants some attention in that it is a direct contrast with Persius' self-description as *callidus iunctura acri* (Satire 5.14). As such, Persius' programmatic poem--and it is a programmatic poem, contrary to assertions of Dessen, Freudenberg, and others of the "style is the man" camp that it is really about morality--emphasizes the two things his poetry will not be: a slavish imitation of the old enhanced with smooth perfection to the point of lifelessness. Again, there is an attribution of lines that ought to be reassigned. Generally, lines 92-97 are all assigned to the Interlocutor, as Harvey (1981: 44) and Braund (2004: 56-57) do:

> I: Sed numeris decor est et iunctura addita crudis.
> Cludere sic versum didicit "Berecyntius Attis"
> et "qui caeruleum dirimebat Nerea delphin,"
> sic "costam longo subduximus Appennino." 95
> "Arma virum," nonne hoc spumosum et cortice pingui
> ut ramale vetus vegrandi subere coctum?'
>
> I: But elegance and smoothness have been added to the raw rhythms of old poetry. That's how "Berecynthian Attis" learned how to end the line, and "The dolphin parting azure Nereus," and "We stole a rib from the

> long Apennines" too. "Arms and the man!" Isn't this frothy stuff, with a thick crust, like an ancient dried-up branch with swollen bark?[186]

The curious insertion of a quote from Vergil, perhaps even the "title" of the *Aeneid*, seems in conflict with what the Foil is demonstrating. His argument is that old forms have reached a high standard and are perfected by contemporary writers whose smoothness and flowing rhythms outperform the poetry of old. Where does Vergil fit into this argument? The description of the poetry as frothy and as an old tree branch dried out with frail bark doesn't work either. Rather, it seems to me that Persius' rebuttal begins at line 96: "Arms and the man! This sure is frothy stuff, isn't it? And with a thick crust/Just like an old, dried out limb with swollen bark." *Arma virum* reads like a literary outburst or swear, much as prayers or divine invocations are used. Harvey (1981: 44) notes that some editors do assign these lines to Persius in the manner suggested here, but notes that "an exclamation of this kind lacks a parallel," deciding that the author is disparaging the *Aeneid* and that the froth is meant to be applied to Vergil. The fact that the expression lacks a parallel, though, isn't compelling when the author is Persius and the subject at hand is innovation and a reinvention of the old. The words have no meaning as a quote (Persius hasn't been lauding Vergil or Vergil's style), so an out-of-the-blue attack on Vergil by the Foil is no more desirable than an unusual use of him as an exclamation. Vergil was part of the Augustan revolution that elevated Latin poetry almost a century earlier. His successors have created overwrought, lifeless versions of the originals, but it is unlikely that the Foil would be making this point. The imagery used here is interesting. The cork tree (*cortex* and *suber*) is notable for its thick,

[186] The translation here is Braund's.

light-weight bark. It's meant, when it's gotten thick enough, to be stripped away, leaving the hard wood underneath. That which is "spumosum et cortice pingui," the frothy contemporary style, is merely an accretion to the hard, old wood underneath (in this case Vergil). It needs to be stripped away. The quality of that bark is indicated by *pinguis*; if the bark is poetic style and refinement, *pinguis* takes on the meaning of "dull, obtuse."[187] Unfortunately, the old wood underneath is implicitly no good any longer either. The cork tree, once stripped, is meant to regenerate its bark. This is a perfect grotesque image of life and renewal. However, this wood is "coctum," cooked, finished, dried out. There's no more life left in this severed branch.

Persius then presses the attack on the modern style, offering up some poetry that is typical of the new, extremely refined style. Again, Persius finds the verses unacceptable:

> P: "Torua Mimalloneis inplerunt cornua bombis,
> et raptum vitulo caput ablatura superbo
> Bassaris et lyncem Maenas flexura corymbis
> euhion ingeminat, reparabilis adsonat echo."
> Haec fierent si testiculi vena ulla paterni
> viveret in nobis? Summa delumbe saliva
> hoc natat in labris et in udo est Maenas et Attis
>
> "With Mimallonean booming they fill full their fierce horn,
> about to carry off the head taken from calf so proud
> Bacchante and Maenad with ivy the lynx about to turn
> shout and shout euho, the regenerate echo rings loud."
> Would this even exist if any blood from our father's balls
> lived in us? This nutless stuff swims over the saliva
> on your lips, that Maenad is dripping, Attis too.

[187] TLL vol. 10^1, 2165.70, 2173.30ff.

Persius' response here is a grotesque antidote to the frothy style he is either quoting or parodying. It is crude, grounded in popular insult: *you have no balls*. Again the image is of life-giving regeneration, like the cork tree, that has lost its ability to produce. Modern day poets' balls are no more productive than the dried up old cork branch. The idea of floating on saliva recalls Persius' objections to the previous poetic demonstration too. The saliva is an echo of *spumosum*, and the image of light poetry just floating on top of spit echoes the lightness of cork. Bramble (1974: 130-131) sees these lines as "rejuvenating ... tired metaphors." He finds parallels for *natat in labris* and *in udo est* as literary metaphors for insincerity, but asserts that there is no such parallel for *saliva*. *Saliva*, he contends, is "direct and physical, centering the reader's attention on the mouth." By physicalizing the older metaphors, Perseus rejuvenates the entire bundle of imagery, "producing immediate surprised realization that literary-critical metaphor is adopting a new shape." This is a nice encapsulation of Persius' program: the rejuvenation and renovation of tired imagery through grotesque techniques such as this kind of bodily physicalization.

Cowherd (1986: 56) notes that *delumbe* in line 104 recalls *carmina lumbum/intrant* at lines 20-21. But the two types of poetry are opposite: the verses at lines 99-102 have no balls, while the verses in the earlier passage are described as potent, penetrating. This should be counted as evidence that the poetry being talked about here is not the same as the poetry in that earlier passage, and that therefore the earlier objections are not Persius'. *Delumbe* is glossed by Cowherd simply as "weak," but the implication of impotence in the word is the polar opposite to what the poetry--Persius' poetry--does in lines 20-21. Persius' grotesque poetry

penetrates, and the Foil objects on moral grounds. He does so similarly at line 87 in the debate about rhetorical style. Persius, on the other hand, objects to poetry that doesn't, that can't penetrate.

The Foil makes a final bid to sway Persius with a threat: he's in danger of alienating the *maiores* (lines 107-110). This is of course a reminder of a similar warning to Horace in *Sermones* 2.1.60-62. It's a neat parallel, because it establishes the relationship to Horace that Persius has been striving for. Persius is not an imitator of Horace, but a rival. That simultaneously acknowledges Horace's greatness and rejects the need for being a slave to it. Horace wrote that warning to himself as a joke--Augustus was in his corner, so who needs *maiores* when you have the *maximus*? Persius, like Horace under Augustus, is part of the new literary elite; he doesn't need to worry about the size of his audience or the patronage of old-fashioned aristocrats, because he is a part of Nero's artistic revolution, if not an outright member of his poetic circle at court. So Persius mockingly concedes. He finishes with a host of images and language that read fine as part of this concession but also operate on a grotesque level as well.

> Nil moror. Euge omnes, omnes bene, mirae eritis res.
> Hoc iuuat? "Hic" inquis "Veto quisquam faxit oletum."
> Pinge duos anguis: "Pueri, sacer est locus, extra
> meiite." Discedo. 111-114

> I give up. Good work everybody, you're all good, amazing stuff.
> Happy now? You say, "Here thou shalt not shit."
> Paint a couple of snakes: "Boys, the place is holy,
> piss outside." I'm going.

"'Hic veto quisquam faxit oletum'" is noted by commentators (Cowherd, 1986: 57; Harvey, 1981: 48) as mock-sacred. But the joke here is that Persius' writing of

poetry is an act of defecation. What makes this humor particularly grotesque is that defecation is not a strictly negative thing in popular-festive humor. It's hurled as an insult, but, most importantly in the lexicon of the grotesque, defecation as part of the material bodily lower stratum is actually symbolic of rebirth and renewal even as it debases.[188] The act of shitting in the grotesque, as we've seen with Claudius in the *Apocolocyntosis*, is an ambivalent one: dirty, crude, insulting, but simultaneously generating new growth. Likewise, the next line plays on similar dual meanings. Persius won't piss on the "sacred" anymore. In this case, the sacred stands in for contemporary poetry, *dia poemata*, as he has already mockingly called it in line 31, and for the *maiores* who hold it in such esteem. Persius' criticism, his type of poetry, is urination and a defilement of the sacred. This is exactly the kind of relationship popular-festive culture has with official culture. And on those occasions when popular-festive culture is given the chance, such as Saturnalia, the sacred gets its due. Like shitting, pissing is part of the material bodily lower stratum that implies life and rebirth simultaneously with insult and debasement. While Persius shits and pisses his poetry, he is assaulting "the sacred" of official culture and giving birth to something new and vital. After the imperative *extra meiite*, Persius humorously says "Discedo." He's off to take his piss! It's worth noting that this warning is issued to *pueri*. Persius has consistently categorized contemporary poetry not only as enervated but as old. Its admirers are *patrui* (11) and Persius bemoans that Romans

[188] Bakhtin (1968: 151): "Images of feces and urine are ambivalent, as are all the images of the material bodily lower stratum; they debase, destroy, regenerate, and renew simultaneously."

live now *nucibus ... relictis* (10). But Persius isn't a *patruus* and instead embraces the naughty behavior of *pueri* in his pissing where he's not supposed to.

The first satire isn't about morality, and it isn't a "satire" on corrupt morals in the Age of Nero. It is a programmatic satire, and a big--but often overlooked--part of that program is laughter. The poem begins and ends with laughter. At the opening, as noted above, Persius mourns that Romans are like stuffy old uncles and that they've left their playthings behind. In the next line he admits that he can't help but laugh (12). At the end he recommends Old Comedy to be read alongside his own poetry. He also bookends the poem with the folktale of Midas and his ass's ears, a story about (poor) judgment of poetry and about irrepressible laughter. At line 8, Persius hints that he has a secret, but can't tell: "Romae quis non—a, si fas dicere" (Who in Rome doesn't ... ah, if only I were allowed to say it.); at line 12, although he hasn't yet fully divulged that secret, he concludes: *cachinno* (I laugh it up). After his mock surrender (it doesn't last long) to his Foil near the end of the poem, he returns to the secret:

> Me muttire nefas? Nec clam? Nec cum scrobe? Nusquam?
> Hic tamen infodiam. Vidi, vidi ipse, libelle:
> auriculas asini quis non habet? Hoc ego opertum,
> hoc ridere meum, tam nil, nulla tibi vendo
> Iliade. 119-123

> Am I not allowed to mutter? Even in secret? Not even in a hole? Never?
> I'll dig it here anyway. I saw it, I saw it myself, little book:
> who doesn't have ass's ears? This secret,
> this laughter of mine I won't sell you for anything, not for any *Iliad*.

The story itself is appropriately grotesque, grounded in folk tradition and, of course, sporting the grotesque hybrid image of a man with ass's ears. Also worth noting

again, for an even more grotesque spin, is Bramble's suggestion that the unusual *auriculas* is meant to suggest ass*hole* ears as well. Built into this story both times are verbs of laughter (*cachinno*, *ridere*) and that recalls the end of the story of Midas' ass-ears. The secret, known only to Midas himself and to his barber, is too much for the servant to keep, just as Persius' secret has to come out. The barber runs away into the countryside and digs his hole by a stream, whispering the secret into it and then covering it up. But the story, as all would know, doesn't end there. The secret acts like a seed, and out of the ground where it's buried grow reeds that continually spread the word as they blow in the breeze, resulting in the laughter of the people at the expense of the aristocrat. In the lines above, Persius' book, it turns out, is the hole he digs. We've already been told several times that he's not looking for a big audience, and the vocative *libelle* in line 20 with *infodiam*, tells us that in Persius' version of the story he's whispering the secret into his book. So, out of the hole he's dug--his little book--new growth will sprout, and that growth will lead to laughter, the kind of grotesque finale that is perfectly suited to a programmatic poem about the grotesque style. That word for ears, *auriculae*, occurs periodically throughout the poem, at lines 22, 59, and 108 in addition to the passages above. With this repeated word and the positioning of the story at both the beginning and the end of the poem, this, *pace* Dessen, functions as the dominant metaphor for the poem.

Satire 4

Midway through the book Satire 4 brings the reader back face-to-face with the grotesque in all of its unsubtle glory. The language and imagery are as intensely grotesque and popular as any of the most over-the-top, down-and-dirty moments in

Satire 1, yet much more concentrated due to the relative brevity of Satire 4. This is a grotesque outburst strategically centered in the book of satires to serve as a reminder of what the new style can do. The satire may also be read as a very funny confrontation between classical and grotesque styles, a sort of meta-programmatic poem, as the heroic Alcibiades, perfect in form, gets lambasted by the grotesque-within-grotesque monologues of Socrates and his alter egos.

Such a grotesque tour-de-force has often stymied interpretation, because it is irreconcilable with the need to read Persius as a serious, philosophical, even didactic satirist. The result has been, in part, Persius' reputation among critics for obscurity, bookishness, and a host of other faults.[189] Reckford (1962: 484) sums up the problem of Satire 4 nicely:

> On the one hand, it has been called "scholarly" (by which is usually meant "unimaginative"; compare "bookish" and "banal"); but at the same time, Persius' imagery of sexual perversion has made strong commentators tremble. The satire, then, is inevitably summed up as a presentation, at once unoriginal and needlessly obscure, of ... commonplaces.

The "commonplace" that most end up clinging to is contained in line 23, "Ut nemo in sese temptat descendere" (nobody tries to get down inside himself) with variations on the theme of self-knowledge again at 42, "caedimus inque vicem praebemus crura sagittis" (we make cuts and in turn expose our legs to arrows) and 51, "respue quod non es" (spit out what you aren't).[190]

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[189] E.g., Wehrle (1992: 45): "The basic message (theme) of P.4 is not far different from that of P.3: Alcibiades represents ignorance of philosophy, ethical values, the predisposition to seem rather than to be; Socrates is physician thereof."
[190] For Satire 4, I use my own translations throughout.

Finding an obvious anchor, commentators and critics first examine this satire through the lens of Plato's[191] *Alcibiades 1*. This is due to the overall similarity between Persius' opening lines (1-22) to that dialogue as well as several specific verbal echoes documented by Villeneuve (1918: 97-101). Dessen (1968: 62) believes that this relationship is actually the key to understanding the entire poem and asserts that "structural similarities clearly suggest that Persius' entire fourth Satire is a close imitation of the *Alcibiades 1*." Ultimately, Dessen returns to her idea of a dominant metaphor, again claiming, as she does in the first satire, that that metaphor is corruption represented by homosexuality: "Alcibiades is a *dēmerastēs* whose relationship to the *populi* is, metaphorically, a homosexual one" (1968: 63). She also notes the difference in tone between the Socrates of Plato and the Socrates of Persius, saying that Persius' Socrates is "primarily a critic whose most effective weapon is irony" (1968: 63). While clear on the dominant metaphor here, Dessen doesn't really make any sense of it. Kißel (1990: 498) points out that "die Vorstellung einer durchgängigen Metaphorik ausdem Bereich "Homosexualität" und

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[191] There is doubt about this dialogue actually being Plato's, and scholars today generally put it among the pseudo-Socratic works (see Dessen (1968: 97-105) and Hooley (1998: 123). The dialogue between Socrates and Alcibiades was a popular type: Diogenes Laertius, in discussing Aeschines, introduces the already uncertain provenance of several Socratic dialogues and indicates the existence of two Socrates-Alcibiades dialogues at 2.61: "ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν Ἀντισθένους τόν τε μικρὸν Κῦρον καὶ τὸν Ἡρακλέα τὸν ἐλάσσω καὶ Ἀλκιβιάδην καὶ τοὺς τῶν ἄλλων δὲ ἐσκευώρηται" (But (Aischines) also ransacked Antisthenes' little *Cyrus*, lesser *Herakles*, *Alcibiades*, and others' works). The verb ἐσκευώρηται literally suggests going through someone else's baggage, and suggests a degree of disapproval. Nonetheless, here we have at least two Socratic-style dialogues with Alcibiades (one of Aischines, one of Antisthenes). Elsewhere, Diogenes Laertius mentions Socrates-Alcibiades dialogues by Euclides (2.108) and again lists an *Alcibiades* among the works of Antisthenes (6.18). At 3.51 he includes the *Alcibiades* 1 (and 2) among Plato's own works.

"Impotenz"... läßt sich kaum ohne größere Schwierigkeiten nachvollziehen ... zuweilen verbaut sie sogar jeden Zugang zum Text." Why use a (pseudo-)Socratic dialogue this way? Passing over the extreme language and almost willfully ignoring the humor in this poem, Dessen reads it as didactic, encouraging the reader to "know thyself." Her reading goes beyond others in its argument for a "scholarly" interpretation, but ultimately her conclusion still falls into the same trap of focusing on the commonplace.

Reading the satire as though it were a genuine echo of the *Alcibiades 1*, then, yields little fruit, I would argue, because it fails to account for the tone and language of the poem, by far its most pronounced features. Dessen fails to suggest a purpose for the radical departure in language, and the structural echoes she sees do not seem to add any meaning to her dominant metaphor of politician as male prostitute or the supposed didactic exhortation to self-knowledge. Bartsch (2015: 83) acknowledges that the typical approach to Satire 4 as a moralizing piece of philosophy "is not an entirely satisfactory answer." She focuses on the imagery and also points out that "the speaking voice of the *Satires* does not exemplify Stoic calm himself ... How can this figure point out our route to wisdom?" That reading is incoherent, and almost completely ignores the purpose of the over-the-top wildness of the language, imagery, and obscenity in this poem.

Commentators like Hooley (1997), Henderson (1999), and Freudenberg (2001) have, to varying degrees, suggested that the incoherence of the poem is actually intentional--the real point. Freudenberg (2001: 193-194) incorporates the

incoherent rant of Satire 4 into his broader vision of a world in which criticism is pointless, impossible, and ultimately hypocritical:

> But why make the gossip-mongers resonate with satire's standard sounds and sound so quasi-Persianic, even in chiding them for being so glib and extreme? The irony is telling, and somewhat disorienting, for it blurs that crucial, but hard to fix, line that we normally maintain in separating 'satire/dialogue' ... from 'common gossip' ... Furthermore, it captures a problem not only of reading Persius ... but it captures a problem of satiric writing as well, an enormous angst felt in deigning to criticize at all in *Nero's* Rome.

Freudenberg's larger picture of Persius' satire and Nero have already been discussed. Here, the particulars of that argument in relation to Satire 4 at least, unlike so many other readings of this satire, make a genuine stab at incorporating the language into that reading. Essentially, this is what Socrates sounds like as a denizen of Nero's Rome (more on this later). But there are problems with this reading. First, as discussed above, is the assumption that "the urge to pack all of Rome's woes into one enormous saddlebag and load it on Nero's back must have been enormous at this time" (2001: 194). But what were those woes, when was "this time?" The argument relies on Nero-the-tyrant as a given, as always. And, when all the criticism and metacriticism have settled, Freudenberg (2001: 195) still sees the "message" as the tried and true "Know thyself:" "Persius' criticism has served the function of a smokescreen, a welcome critical noise we make to drown out the telltale rattling in our own chests."

Hooley offers a similar reading with a similar goal in mind.[192] He sees "an odd sort of hermeneutic turn" (1997: 153) in which the confusion and

[192] With a slightly different emphasis, more on Stoicism, Hooley keeps to this reading in his 2007 book *Roman Satire* as well: "Things have got bleaker. Yet,

disjointedness of every perceived message that can be extracted from the poem ultimately leads to "a reliable epistemological process ... and the only one available to us: 'You will learn something about yourself that is painful and true.' It is a fair beginning." To get to his reading, though, Hooley has had to work: there is the sense that the vibrancy of Persius' language has been dulled by repeated readings, repeated efforts to bring our Stoic satirist back to message. Hooley wants to put this poem in dialogue with a Horatian Epistle and with Vergil. That is very much in accordance with Hooley's M.O., and especially in the case of Horace is a sound instinct. But I believe the immediacy of language and characterization drown out any "message," philosophical or political. The contrast is one of tone and language. This is grotesque poetry, as opposed to Horatian/Augustan poetry. The kind of subtle, "hermeneutic," allusive reading that Hooley suggests is Persius' intent would be a difficult one to achieve without first becoming desensitized to Persius' language itself, which raises the question, why resort to such intense language in the first place? Ultimately, the message that Hooley finds is not very far away from the *Alcibiades 1* reading of "Know thyself," a reading which also fails to account for Persius' vivid, obscene language.

Casaubon (1695: 143) says that after the first twenty-two lines, this dialogue has nothing to do with the *Alcibiades 1*, and I am inclined to agree. The connection with the *Alcibiades 1* is sufficiently established for Persius' goals of generic humor, both parody and irony. Avoiding drawing too tight a connection between the

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ultimately, anti-imperial venom is not the final point of this acid satire. For more than most, this poem constantly reminds us of its moral: 'how no one dares the descent into self'" (23); "'live with yourself'" (51). "Whatever the excess or ugliness without, the Stoic is concerned chiefly with what's inside" (109).

Alcibiades 1 and this poem also removes the need to explain or justify that connection through a labored misreading of the poem. Rather, Persius' idea is to bring both the Socratic dialogue as a genre and Socrates and Alcibiades as characters to the audience's mind in order to provide an uproarious grotesque parody of those characters, in part to laugh at pedantic philosophers and their philosophical pedantry.

The opening lines of Satire 4 tell us to "believe" that it is Socrates delivering this "dialogue." The irreverence for genre and the illusion of a dialogue are reminiscent of Satire 1 where Persius jokingly calls his Foil "Quisquis es, o modo quem ex adverso dicere feci" (44). It is difficult not to take away, in fact, the impression that Satires 1 and 4 are connected through devices such as this as well as through language. While Dessen (1968: 63-64) sees this connection as a return to Persius' criticism of vice, I suggest that instead Satire 4 is in part a return to the programmatic issues raised in the first satire, using Socrates as the physical embodiment of the grotesque and Alcibiades as the embodiment of contemporary classical style poetry.

The presence of Socrates in this poem immediately conjures images of the grotesque, particularly when he is paired, as he is here, with Alcibiades. The pairing of these two in this scene need not be limited to an invocation of the *Alcibiades 1*, but must also conjure recollection of the two characters in their more festive appearance in Plato's *Symposium*, as Bartsch (2015: 97-98) points out. Persius, rather than writing a parallel to a single work, is instead recalling the interplay between these two characters in multiple texts. The focus should be on the

characterization of the two, rather than on specific structural echoes between two texts alone.

The scene from the *Symposium* and the *Alcibiades 1* have enough in common thematically to warrant broadening the search for Persius' references beyond the single dialogue.[193] Alcibiades in the *Symposium* appears cocky and very certain of his own good looks, just as "Socrates" paints him in Persius' satire. When Alcibiades first arrives (fashionably late) at the party in the *Symposium*, he's seated on the same couch as Socrates:

> Πάνυ γε, εἰπεῖν τὸν Ἀλκιβιάδην· ἀλλὰ τίς ἡμῖν ὅδε τρίτος συμπότης; καὶ ἅμα μεταστρεφόμενον αὐτὸν ὁρᾶν τὸν Σωκράτη, ἰδόντα δὲ ἀναπηδῆσαι καὶ εἰπεῖν Ὦ Ἡράκλεις, τουτὶ τί ἦν; Σωκράτης οὗτος; ἐλλοχῶν αὖ με ἐνταῦθα κατέκεισο, ὥσπερ εἰώθεις ἐξαίφνης ἀναφαίνεσθαι ὅπου ἐγὼ ᾤμην ἥκιστά σε ἔσεσθαι. καὶ νῦν τί ἥκεις; καὶ τί αὖ ἐνταῦθα κατεκλίνης, καὶ[1] οὐ παρὰ Ἀριστοφάνει οὐδὲ εἴ τις ἄλλος γελοῖος ἔστι τε καὶ βούλεται, ἀλλὰ διεμηχανήσω ὅπως παρὰ τῷ καλλίστῳ τῶν ἔνδον κατακείσῃ;
>
> (213 B-C)

> "Absolutely," said Alcibiades. "But who is the third man drinking with us?" At the same time he turned and saw Socrates, and seeing him he jumped up and said, "Sweet Herakles, what have we here! It's Socrates! You were sitting there to get the jump on me again, just like you usually appear all of a sudden when I least expect you'll be there. And why are you here now? Why again did you sit here, and not next to Aristophanes or someone else who's silly and plans to be? Why did you scheme to sit next to the best looking man in here?"

The *Alcibiades 1* begins with a similar tone to the relationship:

> ΣΩ. ... κατὰ πάντα δὴ ταῦτα σύ τε μεγαλαυχούμενος κεκράτηκας τῶν ἐραστῶν ἐκεῖνοί τε ὑποδεέστεροι ὄντες

[193] Dessen (1968: 97-105) in her appendix on The *Sokratikoi Logoi* details the many echos among various texts of Alcibiades-Socrates scenes as well as Xenophon's scene between Socrates and Euthydemus as an Alcibiades stand-in.

ἐκρατήθησαν, καί σε ταῦτ᾽ οὐ λέληθεν· ὅθεν δὴ εὖ οἶδα ὅτι θαυμάζεις, τί διανοούμενός ποτε οὐκ ἀπαλλάττομαι τοῦ ἔρωτος, καὶ ἥντιν᾽ ἔχων ἐλπίδα ὑπομένω τῶν ἄλλων πεφευγότων.
ΑΛΚ. Καὶ ἴσως γε, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκ οἶσθ᾽ ὅτι σμικρόν με ἔφθης. ἐγὼ γάρ τοι ἐν νῷ εἶχον πρότερός σοι προσελθὼν αὐτὰ ταῦτ᾽ ἐρέσθαι, τί ποτε βούλει καὶ είς τίνα ἐλπίδα βλέπων ἐνοχλεῖς με, ἀεὶ ὅπου ἂν ὦ ἐπιμελέστατα παρών· (104 C-D)

SOCRATES: ... and acting like a big shot because of all these things you've overpowered your lovers and they, being rather weak, have been overpowered, and this has not escaped your notice. Therefore I know very well that you are wondering what I'm thinking when I don't give up my passion for you, and what hope I have when I stick around after the rest have run off.

ALCIBIADES: Ah--maybe you don't know, Socrates, that you're just a little ahead of me. For I was planning before to come to you to ask this same question: what in the world is your plan and what do you envision when you harass me, always very careful to be wherever I am?

Both of these suggest a relationship in which Alcibiades considers himself, at least initially, to have the upper hand, thanks in part to his good looks. Alcibiades is cocky and interested in his own physical appeal, and over the course of both scenes the tables are gradually turned until the audience sees that it is in fact Socrates who has control of matters. In the *Symposium* at 215-216 Alcibiades refers to Socrates as an irresistible speaker who brings him to tears and makes him feel ashamed. In the *Alcibiades 1* near the end of the dialogue (135 D) Alcibiades literally declares that their respective roles have been reversed: "λέγω ὅτι κινδυνεύσομεν μεταβαλεῖν τὸ σχῆμα, ὦ Σώκρατες, τὸ μὲν σὸν ἐγώ, σὺ δὲ τούμόν." Whether these are intentional echoes, as Dessen (1968: 99) suggests, or simply an indication that the Socrates-Alcibiades dynamic was consistent in its portrayal across different authors cannot be

determined. Considering how closely these two works resemble each other in establishing the relationship between the philosopher and the politician, I think it is reasonable to assume that a reference to one could provoke a series of associations with the various works in which these two characters spar.

A notable carry-over from the two Greek works to Persius' poem is the Socratic sneak attack. In Plato, Alcibiades, reclining at the symposium, doesn't see Socrates at first, then accuses him of an ambush (ἑλλοχῶν). In the *Alcibiades 1*, Alcibiades notes that Socrates is always showing up wherever he happens to be. Persius takes the ambush from the figurative in Plato to the literal: Alcibiades is minding his own business, perhaps sunbathing, when Socrates descends upon him with a very different kind of didactic stance from what's been seen in Plato, pseudo- or otherwise. This literal surprise attack calls both the *Alcibiades 1* and the *Symposium* into play, giving Persius ample fodder for *acres iuncturae* on thematic, generic, and linguistic levels.

Socrates' "ambush" of Alcibiades in the *Symposium* is noted almost immediately upon the younger man's arrival. Alcibiades' entrance in Plato is notably festive (and would perhaps even be Saturnalian in spirit to a Roman reader) in his drunkenness and truth telling.

> Καὶ οὐ πολὺ ὕστερον Ἀλκιβιάδου τὴν φωνὴν ἀκούειν ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ σφόδρα μεθύοντος καὶ μέγα βοῶντος, ἐρωτῶντος ὅπου Ἀγάθων καὶ κελεύοντος ἄγειν παρ᾽ Ἀγάθωνα. ἄγειν οὖν αὐτὸν παρὰ σφᾶς τήν τε αὐλητρίδα ὑπολαβοῦσαν καὶ ἄλλους τινὰς τῶν ἀκολούθων, καὶ ἐπιστῆναι ἐπὶ τὰς θύρας ἑστεφανωμένον αὐτὸν κιττοῦ τέ τινι στεφάνῳ δασεῖ καὶ ἴων, καὶ ταινίας ἔχοντα ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς πάνυ πολλάς καὶ εἰπεῖν· Ἄνδρες, χαίρετε· με· θύοντα ἄνδρα πάνυ σφόδρα δέξεσθε συμπότην, ἢ ἀπίωμεν ἀναδήσαντες μόνον Ἀγάθωνα, ἐφ᾽ ᾧπερ

ἤλθομεν; ... ἆρα καταγελάσεσθέ μου ὡς μεθύοντος; ἐγὼ δέ, κἂν ὑμεῖς γελᾶτε, ὅμως εὖ οἶδ᾽ ὅτι ἀληθῆ λέγω. ἀλλά μοι λέγετε αὐτόθεν, ἐπὶ ῥητοῖς εἰσίω ἢ μή; συμπίεσθε ἢ οὔ; 212 D-E

And not much later they heard the voice of Alcibiades in the hall--very drunk and shouting loud, asking where Agathon was and ordering them to bring him to Agathon. So the flute-girl and some of his entourage brought him to them, and he stood at the door wearing a sort of a bushy crown of ivy and violets, and having a lot of bands all over his head and he said, "Greetings, gents. Will you have me--a man thoroughly and completely drunk--to drink with you, or should I just put a wreath on Agathon and leave, which is why I came? ... What, are you going to laugh at me because I'm drunk? Even if you laugh, all the same I know very well I'm speaking the truth. But tell me right now: am I coming in or not? Will you drink with me or not?

The choice that Persius makes in Satire 4 of referencing Socrates and Alcibiades needs a purpose. One of those purposes is to put the angry diatribe of "Socrates" (we're instructed to imagine it's him) into comparison with the more festive spirit of the Alcibiades-Socrates dynamic in the *Symposium*. Immediately the reader is confronted with the contrast between the drinking and festive behavior in the *Symposium* and the finger-wagging that kicks off Satire 4 and quickly escalates to a full-blown obscene tirade.

Also in contrast with Socrates' abuse in Satire 4 is the more festive approach to abuse that Alcibiades delivers in the *Symposium*, a praise-cum-abuse of Socrates that is much in keeping with the ideas of ambivalent praise associated with the grotesque style. In fact, Rabelais paraphrases this passage in *Gargantua*, and Bakhtin comments upon its use in that work extensively (1984:169ff). Alcibiades'

drunkenness at a party designed for drinking is very much in keeping with festive spirit, as is his good-natured abuse of Socrates.

> Σωκράτη δ᾽ ἐγὼ ἐπαινεῖν, ὦ ἄνδρες, οὕτως ἐπιχειρήσω, δι᾽ εἰκόνων. οὗτος μὲν οὖν ἴσως οἰήσεται ἐπὶ τὰ γελοιότερα, ἕσται δ᾽ ἡ εἰκὼν τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἕνεκα, ού τοῦ γελοίου. φημὶ γὰρ δὴ ὁμοιότατον αὐτὸν εἶναι τοῖς σιληνοῖς τούτοις τοῖς ἐν τοῖς ἑρμογλυφείοις καθημένοις, οὓς τινας ἐργάζονται οἱ δημιουργοὶ σύριγγας ἢ αὐλοὺς ἔχοντας, οἳ διχάδε διοιχθέντες φαίνονται ἔνδοθεν ἀγάλματα ἔχοντες θεῶν. καὶ φημὶ αὖ ἑοικέναι αὐτὸν τῷ σατύρῳ τῷ Μαρσύᾳ. ὅτι μὲν οὖν τό γε εἶδος ὅμοιος εἶ τούτοις, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐδ᾽ αὐτὸς ἄν[1] που ἀμφισβητήσαις· 215 A-B
>
> Gents, I'll try to praise Socrates this way, through comparisons. Maybe he'll think it's more to make fun of him, but this will be a comparison for the sake of truth, not mockery. I say that he is exactly like those Sileni sitting in the statue shops, which the workmen fashion holding pipes or flutes. When they are opened down the middle they turn out to be holding statues of gods inside. And again I say that he resembles the satyr Marsyas. That you are just like them in appearance, Socrates, I think not even you would disagree.

The imagery of Alcibiades' abuse where he compares Socrates (Figure 8) to Silenus (Figure 9) and to Marsyas, both satyrs, saying that Socrates bears a striking resemblance to them both,[194] goes even further to situate this festive scene and the character of Socrates in the world of the grotesque. Socrates' ugly appearance and satyr-like qualities, unusually, were preserved in his portraits soon after his death. Zanker (1995: 32) notes that the very "earliest portrait of the philosopher originated about ten to twenty years after his death and shows him in the guise of Silenus." Zanker, using portraits of the well-known as well as Classical Attic

[194] Xenophon, another pupil of Socrates, also describes him in this way in *Symposium* 4.19 and again at 5.5-7 where Socrates hilariously proves he's handsomer than Critobulus!

gravestones, notes the startling break with the norm of *kalokagathia*, the norm of a "city filled with perfectly proportioned and idealized human figures in marble and bronze embodying virtue and moral authority." Essentially, this portrait is a challenge to official culture: an embrace of the "ugly," represented by the typical features of a satyr and by a degree of realism in the portrait of Socrates, flies in the face of the city's embrace of the "heroic" and the "ideal" as standards for excellence and virtue. In his life, Socrates challenged official culture; in his portrait, his admirers continue to do so, using the grotesque features of a satyr as "a rather forceful and provocative statement and ... a kind of extension of Socratic discourse into another medium" (Zanker, 1995: 39). Official culture, in this case, even took the trouble to resist this aesthetic rebellion. About a century later, as part of the Lycurgan program "to strengthen the sense of communal identity and to provide a model for the kind of good citizen that the city needed" (Zanker, 1995: 58), the Athenian assembly itself commissioned a portrait statue of its now famous intellectual for display in a public building (Figure 10). This "official" portrait of Socrates goes as far as it can to reconciling the well-known features of the earlier, rebellious portrait, with the still dominant principles of *kalokagathia*: "the philosopher once likened to a silen now stands in Classical contrapposto pose, his body well proportioned, ... devoid of any trace of the famed ugliness that his friends occasionally evoked, the fat paunch, the short legs, or the waddling gait" (Zanker, 1995: 60). The face has been harmonized (as much as possible, given the well-known distinctive features) with the ideal as well: "the provocative quality of the silen's mask has disappeared, and the face ... is assimilated to that of a mature

citizen." Zanker himself never connects Socrates' portrait to the grotesque, but the original portrait's occupation of the opposite end of the spectrum from the ideal representations of official culture, and its choice of a popular, mythical hybrid creature (as opposed to straight realism) to do so, place the image of the philosopher in the realm of the grotesque. It is no surprise then, that this image of Socrates would be resisted by official culture, even as it was embraced more and more by popular culture.

The grotesque appearance of Socrates' portraits is in fact clearly echoed and amplified in popular sculpture and painting in Pompeii and Rome. The grotesque representation of intellectuals in popular art can be seen as a long-standing tradition, Zanker (1995: 33) notes with two examples from "modest" Greek pottery. In both, the heads are greatly enlarged, and the grotesque sophist also has silenus-like features like the portrait of Socrates. The second (Figure 11), generally identified as Aesop (whose fable Socrates in Satire 4 references) likewise has a grotesquely large head and long, shaggy beard and hair. The popular grotesqueing of Socrates in Pompeii follows suit: the painting identified as Socrates in the House of the Physician (Figure 12) incorporates the silenus features typically attributed to the philosopher and, like the popular pottery, enlarges the figure's head and gives him short stubby legs to boot. The figure is grotesquely comical. A less extreme modification to the Socrates portrait can be seen in a bust from the early Imperial period (Figure 13). Unlike the original from which this copy was based, the Roman version adds a smile. Zanker (1995: 12) suggests that this innovation is an attempt to "humanize" the satyr features, but it rather seems more of a complement to them.

Adding a smile to the portrait emphasizes Socrates' anti-establishment humor and irony, while it helps to put this relatively authentic portrait a little bit more in the comical world of the grotesque philosophers seen in Greek pottery and Roman wall painting. The grotesque painting of Socrates bears a striking resemblance to Pompeian representations of actual Silenus figures, a classic example of which can be seen in the Villa of the Mysteries (Figure 14). Both Socrates and Silenus in these images are bald, paunchy, and misproportioned. In the Silenus image, Silenus' appearance is associated with the mask held directly over his head: the arching eyebrows, gaping mouths, flat, broad noses, the configuration of the beard and mustache, all serve to tie these two images closely together. Socrates in the House of the Physician shares most of these qualities too. The grotesque image of the silenus and the grotesque image of the mask go hand-in-hand,[195] and masks like these are woven into the intricate, grotesque decorative scheme of the Golden House itself (Figures 15-18).

The depiction of Socrates as a realistic incarnation of the mythical, hybrid, goat-men satyrs, famous for their drunkenness and festive behavior, is a location of the philosopher in the realm of the popular and the festive, and it has been used as such in a grotesque continuum from early portrait sculptures of the philosopher through Roman wall painting, from Plato through Persius and on into Rabelais. This location of Socrates within the marketplace world of the grotesque helps to anticipate the harsh language and abuse that so uncharacteristically flows from the philosopher. Freudenberg (2001: 189) wishes to read this "barrage of obscenities

[195] Zanker (1995) in fact often describes the characteristics of the Socrates portrait as resembling a Silenus *mask*.

and pornographic vignettes" as a comment on and contrast of the worlds of democratic, moral Athens and Nero's decadent Rome: "how Socratic dialogue breaks apart in the harsh transition from Plato's Athens to Persius' Rome, with the stakes of a moral education having been raised, and a new bottom having been scraped, by the accession of Nero." Focusing on the satire's most famous sound bite, "Ut nemo in sese temptat descendere, nemo," Freudenberg reads Socrates' rant here as a symptom of a Rome in which the audience and even a Socrates are so repulsed by Nero, "Rome's one, most spectacular, tail-swishing ass" (2001: 190), that the ability to be introspective, to look within, is wiped out by the need to constantly cry out against the decadent, amoral distraction. The sheer volume of Neronian moral decay drowns out the potential of self-criticism. Freudenberg is right to dismiss the intent of this satire as didactic. Dessen (1968: 63) steadfastly downplays and even ignores the extreme language, insisting instead on "irony" in the voice of Socrates that "serves to relieve the didactic tone of the Satire." Dessen, in her argument here, uses Fiske's (1920: 100-104) observation that Socratic irony was popular in Stoic circles as a tool to make a didactic message more palatable. Fiske (1920: 100) describes this Socratic irony in such a way that it seems strange Dessen would attempt to apply it to the "Socrates" of Satire 4: "in brief, the strongly marked character of Socrates and of the Socratic dialect caused the terms εἴρων and εἰρωνεία to be applied to Socrates as indicating a simulated self-depreciation and humility or a simulated ignorance." Given the extremities of language reached in Persius' poem and the very different characterization of "Socrates" here, it seems challenging to liken it to anything truly in the vein of the *Socratici libri*. This isn't a

Socratic dialogue, nor can it possibly serve the same purpose as one. Freudenberg sees the Socrates of Satire 4 as poisoned by Nero and Rome: if even Socrates can't function as a sympathetic moralist anymore, what's a Roman to do? Hurl insults and judge others (Nero), according to Freudenberg (2001: 191). Ultimately, Persius' criticism is of criticism itself, because it satisfies and distracts from looking within.

What's missing from this interpretation? The humor, first and foremost. Persius has set this "dialogue" in the context not of Plato's dialogues of ironic, but sober, philosophy but in the more ribald world of his *Symposium*. In typical fashion, he takes that ribald world and turns it into something *decoctius* for us. We are meant to recall Alcibiades' proud proclamations of drunkenness and his laughing description of Socrates as a satyr at least as much as we are meant to recall the *Alcibiades 1*, whose primary purpose in this satire is to serve as an object of parody. We are also given a winking joke from the satirist himself that this is all play in line 1. It's hard to imagine that this is the kind of ill-tempered, poisoned griping about Nero and "contemporary mores" that Persius' critics typically see. If "King Midas has ass's ears" was too big a risk for posthumous publication (whether or not that's true, it's often mentioned), then surely this thinly veiled disguise as Socrates while the satirist comments on Rome and, perhaps, its *princeps* by calling them Athens and Alcibiades would be impossible. The problem here is the standard assumption that Nero was bad (or at least perceived as bad by the satirist and everyone else who wrote good literature) and that therefore, as a satirist, Persius must be setting his satiric sights on Nero and his decadent by-products. On the other hand, if this satire is read as the kind of over-the-top, tongue-in-cheek street abuse one finds as a key

component of the grotesque, the humor of that rant in all of its grotesque superabundance is restored and, ultimately, the world of Nero—the *new* world—doesn't look so bad.

The reason scholars seem inclined to dismiss the identification is sometimes the common assumption again that Nero, the tyrant, simply wouldn't have tolerated it, and that Persius, the oppressed and bookish poet, wouldn't have dared. Freudenberg bucks that trend in his book because his central thesis is that all satire is about the loss of liberty under the emperors. Another problem with reading Alcibiades as Nero is the difficulty of making our traditional construction of Nero make sense in this poem at all. Casaubon (1695: 143), in fact, had so much trouble he just flat out rejected the coherence of the poem. While he identifies Alcibiades with Nero, he states that lines 23-42 "neque commune quicquam habent cum dissertatione Socratis apud Platonem; neque proprie ad Alcibiadem aut ad Neronem spectant." There is simply no (traditional) way to incorporate (the traditional) Nero, Alcibiades, or Socrates' dialogue for that matter, into a reading of that obscenely graphic rant. But there's good indication that we are supposed to think of Nero—and it's pretty overt. Besides the opening line, which puts Nero in mind immediately, and the Nero-aged Alcibiades, we also have more of an indication on line 20: "Dinomaches ego sum ... sum candidus" (I'm Dinomache's boy ... I'm a star). Socrates' Alcibiades' assertion of his right to rule and his privileged place among the populace is based on his descent from his mother. This seems a dead giveaway, with Dinomache standing in for Agrippina, descended from Augustus and therefore more popular than Claudius had been. Freudenberg is right--it's hard to not think of

Nero as this poem begins, so how to make sense of this poem with Nero in it? To begin with, we must assume that the poem is first and foremost intended to make us, and Nero, laugh.

Assuming the identification is one we are expected to make and to laugh at, we are treated to some more very subtle humor at Claudius' expense in the early portion of the poem as well. First, Alcibiades-Nero is addressed as *magni pupille Pericli* (wardling of great Pericles). Claudius then, by extension, is (implicitly in an unflattering comparison) identified with Pericles. The joke runs on multiple levels. Most obviously, Pericles was one of the iconic rulers of Athens. Thucydides describes him as elected, but actually ruling by an authority so impressive that the democracy itself seemed suspended: "ἐγίγνετό τε λόγῳ μὲν δημοκρατία, ἔργῳ δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ πρώτου ἀνδρὸς ἀρχή" (2.65.10). Claudius, by contrast, came to power through a coup by the Praetorians—the first *princeps* to ascend without even the pretense of being voted his powers by the Senate--after a long career in the shadows due to his apparent lack of such authority, and exercised his power through no real personal authority or popularity at all. The identification can only serve to put Claudius, already a target of grotesque ridicule in Seneca, in a ridiculous light. Pericles was also famous as a patron of the arts and as the ruler who made Athens a city worthy of her empire. Claudius was neither, but both of these efforts were actually on the agenda of the new ruler, Nero. Another joke may again be at Claudius' expense nine lines later at lines 10-12:

> Scis etenim iustum gemina suspendere lance
> ancipitis librae, rectum discernis ubi inter
> curva subit vel cum fallit pede regula varo ...

> And indeed you know how to weigh justice in the twin pans
> of the double scale, you can tell a straight line when it goes up
> between curves even when the ruler is crooked with an irregular foot

The words *pede ... varo* may again be a joke at Claudius' expense, emphasizing the distinguishing feature of his grotesque body, and the situation of the words around *regula* and following *fallit* support a jab at the deceased *princeps* similar to the one made by Seneca in the opening lines of the *Apocolocyntosis* and Persius' own "limping" iambics joke in his Prologue. The target of the joke is also alluded to by the reference to justice in the lines preceding. Claudius was famous (and reviled) for his love of dispensing justice, was ridiculed for it in the *Apocolocyntosis*, and again we have "Seneca" targeting him for this.

The joke begins in line 1: "Rem populi tractas?" A little trepidation: we're going to address the *princeps*? No, *believe* ("crede") it's Socrates, talking to Alcibiades. Now we are in the world of Plato et al. But do we "believe" it? He's supposedly addressing Alcibiades, addressed as *pupille* and described as still hairless--*ante pilos*, calling into question whether he is really mature and experienced enough to take matters of state in hand. Nero had assumed the principate at age 17 and was, at the oldest, 25 (though probably younger) when this satire was written. Additionally, the use of *pupille* in line 3 argues a bit more for an identification with Nero, who was Claudius' ward at the time of the transition of power, as opposed to the long gap between Pericles' death and Alcibiades' taking on significant affairs of state. Freudenberg (2001: 190-191) points out that, while "scholars have long doubted whether Nero belongs in this story ... the temptation to read Nero into the poem is strong, and certainly not without reason." Casaubon

(1695: 136-137) has Nero squarely in mind--his commentary on Satire 4 begins "Nerone principe ..." and he spends the better part of his introductory remarks on the satire summarizing Suetonius' portrait of the emperor's *flagitia ac scelera*--and reads this satire as Persius exercising some covert criticism of the emperor and his times as he begins to realize Nero's nastiness. Kißel (1990: 497) sees the Nero-Seneca relationship played out particularly starting at line 23 (once Persius has departed from his Socratic source material). But other commentators[196] are silent on the issue, essentially disregarding the idea. But why disregard it? I believe Persius knew we'd think it—his *crede* in line 1 tells us that we need a little help, a little encouragement, to believe something that isn't believable. Does Persius really want us to believe this? Or is this a case of the reader being instructed not to think of elephants? The *crede* is a joking bit of reverse psychology, making sure we're all aware that we *shouldn't* believe this is really Socrates and Alcibiades. Persius further subverts his imagined Athenian setting in line 8 when his imagined Socrates imagines Alcibiades addressing his citizens as *Quirites*, citizens of Rome. It is possible to see a sharp division in the poem, with an Athenian beginning (philosophical) followed by a Roman end (obscene). Persius' use of *Quirites*, however, suggests otherwise. From the outset, the setting is Roman: what some scholars see as a division, based largely on tone and obscenity, is in fact more likely an escalation. The shift in tone is more a part of characterization, I would argue, than a contrast in setting.

[196] Harvey (1981) and Nikitinski (2002).

As is often the case with Persius, the "dialogue" in the poem is tricky: "what follows is so confusing that few scholars have known quite what to make of it: the attribution of interlocutors becomes less and less clear, teacher and student no longer play the appropriate roles, the original question of the priority of politics or philosophy disappears, and graphic insults implicate the interlocutors in deviant sexual practices" (Bartsch, 2015: 102). As with the first satire, line attribution is important, and can result in very different readings of the poem, depending on who is supposedly speaking. There can be counted as many as six speakers in the poem (Socrates, Alcibiades, Baucis, two passers-by, and the narrator/Persius), but that number is reducible depending on the "reality" of a speaker. An interesting example of redistribution of lines can be found in Jenkinson (1973). Jenkinson suggests that unity and logical consistency (that holy grail of Persius criticism!) can be found in the poem by reading it as a balanced and continual dialogue between Alcibiades and Socrates. (This is a similar approach to what I have done with Satire 1, creating a more evenly balanced back-and-forth between two speakers.) Jenkinson (1973: 525-527) makes a good case for the incoherence of the poem[197] as it is usually read, and an equally good case for the continued presence of Alcibiades:

> The victim in vv. 33-41 has much to connect him with the Alcibiades either of legend or of vv. 1-22. He is a pathic and a dandy (35-41) and he sunbathes (33, cf. 18). His relationship with the populace is suggestively described in exactly the same terms in v. 36 as is Alcibiades's in v. 15. Vv. 44-45 describe the covering up of something diseased under a gorgeous show, using terms not dissimilar from those used of Alcibiades in v. 14. In the final passage, 46b-52, there are, as I mentioned in passing at the beginning of the essay (p. 521 f.), a

[197] He gives an outline of the usual reading 522-523.

> number of things (46b-47, 49, 50-51) which would appropriately be said by, or said of, the Alcibiades of vv. 1-22.

The connections do seem difficult to ignore. Where Jenkinson is missing the mark though is his failure to address the language itself and its escalation throughout the poem for, I would argue, comic effect. Jenkinson wants this poem to be read as a legitimate Socratic dialogue.[198] Dramatically, however, this redistribution fails in Satire 4, as Hooley (1997: 126-127) has noted, because the two speakers have not really taken opposing viewpoints. In Jenkinson's reading, Alcibiades makes the key philosophical point of the poem at lines 23ff. Socrates, at the end, makes a somewhat anticlimactic restatement of Alcibiades' contention. Instead, I would advocate for taking the opposite approach entirely with Satire 4: there is only ever one speaker[199]--our imagined Socrates, who assumes the voices of the other characters (as he occasionally does in Plato[200]), Baucis and the passers-by in the street, and whose tone escalates and whose message loses coherence as he becomes increasingly agitated. Support for this is in the fairly consistent content of the message--the reason Jenkinson's reading fails--and the consistent, though escalating, tone of the language as well.

Socrates' language in this "dialogue" is grotesque from the beginning: abusive, physical, comically abrasive. Casaubon's (1695: 143) belief that the second

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[198] He provides an outline for his dialogue and the attribution of lines on 534.
[199] Discounting the one and a half lines encouraging us to "believe" in lines 1-2.
[200] In the *Apology*, for example, Socrates adopts the voice of unnamed accusers at 19 B: "ὥσπερ οὖν κατηγόρων τὴν ἀντωμοσίαν δεῖ ἀναγνῶναι αὐτῶν· Σωκράτης ἀδικεῖ καὶ ..." (so just as an accuser in court I must read out their testimony: 'Socrates is a wrongdoer and ...'); also Callias at 20 A-C and an unnamed person rebuking him at 20 C.

half of the poem has nothing to do with Socrates is almost certainly bound up in discomfort with the quality of the language, particularly in lines 33-41:

> At si unctus cesses et figas in cute solem,
> est prope te ignotus cubito qui tangat et acre
> despuat: "Hi mores! Penemque arcanaque lumbi
> runcantem populo marcentis pandere vulvas.
> Tum, cum maxillis balanatum gausape pectas,
> inguinibus quare detonsus gurgulio extat?
> Quinque palaestritae licet haec plantaria
> vellant elixasque nates labefactent forcipe adunca,
> non tamen ista filix ullo mansuescit aratro."
>
> But if you're taking it easy, oiled up and sunbathing,
> someone you've never even met will be there by your side
> who taps you and ferociously spits: "This is how you behave!
> Weeding your dick and the dark recesses between your legs
> while you present your drooping hole to the common man.
> Another thing: while you're combing the perfumed wool on your jaws,
> why does your unshaved windpipe stick out of your crotch?
> Let five wrestlers pull up those weed-trees and make your
> butt cheeks twitch after your steam bath with their curved tweezers
> --even so no plough will get that weedpatch under control."

The language here is a concentrated example of the grotesque language that occurs throughout the satire. The obscenity in and of itself is relatively mild, despite its ability to "make strong commentators tremble,"[201] and is actually pretty comfortably located in colloquial and popular parlance. Both *penis* and *vulva* fall into that range, as Adams[202] demonstrates. Rather, it's the picture of this man, naked for all to see, being depilated (a sign of homosexuality, as commentators

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[201] Reckford (1962: 484).

[202] *Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (1982). For *penis* as only mildly vulgar or just colloquial, see 36, where he says *penis* was "a risqué colloquialism"; *vulva* was not an obscene word itself at all--it was used in culinary parlance for an animal's womb (101)--but it "tended to shift its reference slightly to other parts of the female genitalia. In the vocabulary of popular speech no rigid distinction is necessarily made between the womb, the internal genitalia (vagina) and the external pudenda" (103).

inevitably point out). Additionally, the use of *vulvas*, proper to female genitalia (even if the word is mild), is, when "applied to a *cinaedus*, telling."[203]

The colloquial, mildly obscene language is further pushed into the grotesque realm by the agricultural motif that is persistent throughout. For Bakhtin (1968: 145-154), the language of the grotesque is the language of the city's marketplace and the town fair. While Bakhtin does not to any degree explore the makeup of "the people" in that marketplace and fair, I think it is worth noting, especially in the Roman context, the necessary and pervasive presence of people connected to farmers and agricultural laborers or with such people in their not-too-distant past.[204] Thus a Roman audience would be well versed in agricultural imagery and themes. Even the elite utilized the agricultural to represent their ideals--Cincinnatus being a prime example, and one used to grotesque ironic effect in Satire 1--but for "the people" agricultural imagery and parlance would likely have been common. It is significant that Persius, in each of his overtly grotesque satires, invokes an agricultural festival: In Satire 1, the Palilia is referenced at line 72; in the Prologue, the Paganalia in lines 6-7;[205] and in this poem, the Compitalia is invoked at lines 27-31. While Persius does not ever specifically mention Saturnalia, as Seneca and Petronius do, Bakhtin's "town fair and the carnival square" (1968: 146) are

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[203] Harvey (1981: 119). On analogy, Adams (1982: 116) demonstrates that "the use of cunnus=culus, of a male pathic, was highly pejorative." To illustrate, he uses colloquial graffiti (CIL IV.1261): "Futuebatur inquam futuebatur civium Romanorum atractis pedibus cunus" (Fucked, I tell you, fucked was the cunt of the citizens of Rome, legs spread wide). and (CIL IV.10078): "Supreme cinaede assibus, salve conus=(cunnus)!" (Everyone's favorite cheap piece of ass, hello there, cunt!).
[204] See Clarke (2003: 26-28) for "non-elite" Romans' interest in plants and animals as artistic motifs.
[205] Each festival reference is discussed in the subchapter on each poem.

present in all three poems as Roman rural/agricultural festivals.[206] Thus, Persius appropriates agricultural parlance as part of his grotesque style of speech, taking that imagery and vocabulary and reapplying it to the human body in this case. The image of Alcibiades being "weeded" and "ploughed," of "weed-trees" and a "weedpatch" growing up out of him, is a cousin to the grotesque wall painting style that melds human, animal, and plant life into new and singular forms, done in the context of marketplace abuse. Gowers (1994: 142) looks at the imagery of this passage as purely negative, describing "the rent boy, transformed from blooming youth into the withered onions and boiled buttocks of sad old age," but is missing the ambivalence of the grotesque imagery. In this image of youth transformed into old age, life into death, we also see rebirth through the agricultural metaphors. Bakhtin (1968: 24) says that "the grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming ... in this image we find both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end." Gowers is wrong to suggest that this image is sad, and certainly there are no clues in Persius' wild language or over-the-top characterization that suggest we should feel this way. Rather, Persius wraps up his grotesque flourish with a perfect image of ambivalence and rebirth--old age here providing the fertile field--very much blooming--from which the life can't be rooted out.

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[206] Cato, *De Agricultura* 57, lumps the Compitalia in with Saturnalia as a festive occasion for which farmhands ought to receive an extra large ration of wine: "hoc amplius Saturnalibus et Conpitalibus in singulos homines congios III S" ([give] three and a half congii [of wine] per person extra for the Saturnalia and Compitalia). For more on connections between these two festivals, see Nilsson (1921: 206-207).

The juxtaposition of human and animal forms is only the most obvious example of Persius' grotesque *iuncturae acres* in this passage. The literary renovation so key to the Neronian grotesque program is achieved in part by Persius through his renovation of language itself, his *iuncturae acres*. The passage begins at line 33 with a unique expression: "figas in cute solem" (should you happen to fix the sun on your skin). Harvey (1981: 118) reads this as "attempting to acquire a permanent tan, *solem* being metonymy for 'suntan'. The bold *figas ... solem* is then a *iunctura acris*." Even bolder (and *acrior*) is Persius' consistent conflation of head with groin in this brief passage, a classic example of Bakhtin's principle of debasement using the material bodily lower stratum.[207] At lines 36-38, Persius moves immediately from *marcentis ... vulvas* (your drooping hole) up to *maxillis balanatum gausape* (the perfumed wool on your jaws) and back down to *inguinibus detonsus gurgulio* (the unshaved windpipe ... from your crotch). In addition to centering the man's face between his legs line-by-line, Persius uses one of his characteristically bizarre images conflating the head and the groin: *gurgulio*, "windpipe," is used for the man's penis, an unusual equation that has often reduced commentators to a shrug of the shoulders (Harvey, 1981: 119: "the exact force of the word remains uncertain") or to emendation (Cowherd, 1986: 91: "for *curculio*, 'weevil, little bugger'). However, taken in the context of the grotesque language of this passage and Persius' grotesque style as a whole, "windpipe" makes sense and stands among other inventive reimaginings of the human body, such as his *patranti ... ocello* (orgasming eye) from Satire 1.

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[207] Chapter 6 of *Rabelais and his World* (1968: 368-436), "Images of the Material Bodily Lower Stratum."

The attribution of female genitalia, *vulvas*, in line 36 to a man is obviously grotesque on multiple levels, but objections to the word are raised by commentators for a variety of reasons. Many have been moved to emend the text. Kißel[208] (1990: 548-9) sums up the arguments against *vulvas* neatly:

> Gegen diese Erklärung sind jedoch schwere sprachliche und inhaltliche Bedenken zu erheben:
>
> 1) Der Plural bleibt völlig unerklärt.
> 2) Das Partizip *marcentis* will zu einer Vulva nicht besonders gut passen.
> 3) Bei näherem Hinsehen beschäftigt sich der Moralprediger erst v. 40 (*elixae nates*) mit dem Gesäß des Sonnenbadenden, während er zuvor noch die kosmetische Pflege der Geshlechtsteile kritisiert.
> 4) Vor allem wird die gedankliche Stoßrichtung der Passage innerhalb des Ganzen der Satire völlig umgekehrt: Wenn der Sonnenhungrige seinen Steiß tatsächlich wie eine Dirne zum gefälligen Gebrauch präsentiert, sich mithin als alternde Mannshure von höchster Verworfenheit entpuppt, ist die Rede des Sprechers als berechtigter Tadel von tiefem moralischem Ernst einzuordnen; im Zusammenhang muß es sich aber um maliziöse Äußerungen eines Klatschsüchtigen über die etwas dandyhafte, keineswegs jedoch durch sexuelle Abartigkeit bestimmte Körperpflege eines ewigen Jünglings handeln.

But, surrounded by such wildly unusual, grotesque language, does it make sense to make sense of this phrase? The plural, as Harvey (1981: 119) eloquently suggests, "may conceivably be an illogical extension of the 'poetic' plural used of other parts of the body." Housman (1931: 406) does some counting, and notes that, per Martial 11.43.12, a woman may be described as having two *vulvae*, but does not feel that the math works out for applying the word in its plural form to a man. That seems a bit literal, and his emendation *valvas*, which he supports with reference to Catullus

[208] Kißel emends the *vulvas* to *bulbos*, following Richter; Braund (2004) follows.

15.18-19,[209] is tame, architecturally odd, and makes even less sense with *marcentis*, which is used almost exclusively of living things. Richter's (1965: 153-154) emendation *bulbos*, "bulbs/onions" is attractive in maintaining the agricultural imagery and could conceivably work with *marcentis* as well. Adams gives no parallels for the use of *bulbi* this way, but of course Persius is interested in renovating the language. One thing that has not been considered in these arguments is the context of superabundant fertility that is the focus of the imagery in this passage. With all of this grotesque growth going on, the leap to rendering the young man's body as female is less of a logical leap than commentators have suggested. His body is already acting like the earth, typically portrayed as female; it is in fact so fertile that it resists the plough. The plough as "male" and the fertile land as "female" is commonplace poetic imagery; invoking that commonplace and reinventing it is just the kind of reinvention of language Persius' grotesque style strives for. Such an inversion is not even without precedent: taking a page from Housman's book, I would suggest that Catullus experiments--far more delicately and for very different effects--with inverting this imagery in 11.21-24:

> nec meum respectet, ut ante, amorem,
> qui illius culpa cecidit velut prati
> ultimi flos, praeter eunte postquam
> tactus aratro est.
>
> Let her not look for my love, like before,
> which lies fallen--her fault--like a flower
> on the edge of a meadow, after it's been touched
> by a plough passing by.

[209] "... patente porta/percurrent raphanique mugilesque!" (with your gate lying open radishes and mullets will run right through!)

The goal of the two poets is not the same, nor is the effect of the verses, but a similar inversion of male as fertile and female as plough occurs here, and the effect is bold in its novelty. In the end, *bulbos* and *vulvas* are both strikingly vivid and new, but *vulvas* does have the advantage of being in the manuscript. Given Persius' extreme and challenging language throughout the passage, it seems unnecessary to reject the most challenging choice of all.

In addition to the vivid human-vegetation imagery, the *iunctura acris* of line 33, the confounding of the head with the material bodily lower stratum, and the gender inversion, Persius also, perhaps, creates a word: *balanatum*, "perfumed." Harvey (1981: 119), notes that it "is found only here before Priscian and may be P.'s coinage." The novelty is further extended by the noun it modifies: *gausape*. This word, borrowed from Greek, is generally used to mean a woolen cloak, but Persius uses it as a vivid metaphor for a beard here with *maxillis.*[210] Lines 33-41 then, most of which are spoken by an (imaginary) man on the street, are essentially a full on demonstration of Persius' grotesque technique: language is renovated in virtually every possible way even as it is deployed to create grotesque imagery. The fertility of the imagery, like Claudius' dung heap in the *Apocolocyntosis*, is ambivalent: while it registers as comically ugly and abusive in the mouth of the stranger, it simultaneously carries a consistent message of generation, birth, and growth as well, both through agricultural imagery and through female genitalia. The central location of this passage, surrounded by its philosophical commonplaces, is a clue to what is really important to Persius in this poem.

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[210] Harvey (1981: 119).

Quite early in the poem, at line 19, the discussion is placed in the context of the marketplace, the playground of the grotesque:

> The marketplace ... was a world in itself, a world which was one; all 'performances' in this area, from loud cursing to the organized show, had something in common and were imbued with the same atmosphere of freedom, frankness, and familiarity. Such elements of familiar speech such as profanities, oaths, and curses were fully legalized in the marketplace and were easily adopted by all the festive genres...The marketplace was the center of all that is unofficial; it enjoyed a certain extraterritoriality in a world of official order and official ideology ..."
>
> Bakhtin, (1968: 153-154)

At line 21, *pannucia Baucis* is hawking her basil in the marketplace and is as refined in judgment as Alcibiades, who has just (through the imagined mouth of Socrates) claimed that he's *candidus*:

> "Dinomaches ego sum," suffla, "sum candidus." Esto,
> dum ne deterius sapiat pannucia Baucis,
> cum bene discincto cantaverit ocima vernae.
> Ut nemo in sese temptat descendere, nemo,
> sed praecedenti spectatur mantica tergo! (20-24)
>
> "I'm Dinomache's boy," you blowhard, "I'm a star." OK,
> as long as shriveled Baucis here is no less smart,
> after she's sung the praises of her basil--at a great price--to a casual slave.
> Nobody tries to get down into himself, nobody,
> but the pack on the back of the guy in front of you is being watched!

Baucis is a nobody. The mythological name rings as proverbial for a poor old woman, and establishing her as an herb seller puts her on the lowest rung of society, emphasized by her clientele, a *discinctus verna*, literally an "unbelted slave." Typically, *discincto* here is read as "dissolute" in a moral sense,[211] but there is no

[211] e.g. Harvey (1981: 113).

context for this detail: the slave does nothing but buy basil, and the detail of immorality does nothing to enhance the scene; it is read that way because the search for the moralizing satiric message is on. Rather, *discincto* should be interpreted as an indication of how little respect Baucis warrants--a slave needn't present himself suitably to her. Then the detail supports the scene and the other details that are working towards rendering Baucis a woman of no account, thus further degrading Alcibiades, who has already been taking it on the proverbial--unshaven (5), but not (38)--chin. The point here is not morality, but debasement.

Persius then transitions to the second half of the poem with the two lines, 23-24, that are generally considered to be the "theme" and "philosophical center" of the poem. The allusiveness in these two lines, though, lets us know that Persius isn't operating strictly as a moralist. The lines allude to Horace[212] (of course) but, more importantly here, the image derives from fable[213] and therefore is located squarely in the realm of the popular. This is emphasized by its location between the scene with the street-hawker Baucis and the next two men on the street, whom I argue that Socrates also voices.

The first launches an angry tirade against a *dives*. The language in this scene becomes more abusive as our unnamed, hypothetical man-on-the-street responds to Socrates' Alcibiades' innocent question about Vetidius with a string of insults about a millionaire who won't part with his money. The abuse here is warranted, because the *dives* Vettidius is in violation of the popular-festive spirit. The occasion is the

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[212] *Sermones* 2.3.299.
[213] See Cowherd (1986: 89) and Harvey (1981: 113).

celebration of the Compitalia, and Vettidius' poor observance of it is indicated by lines 27-32:

> Hunc ais, hunc dis iratis genioque sinistro,
> qui, quandoque iugum pertusa ad compita figit,
> seriolae veterem metuens deradere limum
> ingemit “hoc bene sit” tunicatum cum sale mordens
> cepe et farratam pueris plaudentibus ollam
> pannosam faecem morientis sorbet aceti?
>
> You're talking about that guy, the one with the gods
> angry at him and his guardian angel so hostile,
> and when he hangs up his yoke at the holey shrine of the crossroads,
> afraid to scrape the ancient dust off his half-bottle of wine
> who groans, "Hope it works out," munching a salted onion
> in its skin and, while his boys are applauding their pot of porridge,
> chokes down the raggedy dregs of vinegar past its prime?

Rather than feasting, he “enjoys” a meager meal of a salted onion in its skin, no preparation, and the dregs of some wine that has crossed over to vinegar. The meagerness of this, especially the refusal to waste anything (even onion peel and dregs) violates the spirit of the celebratory feast. Crucial to the celebration and its psychological impact is overabundance, even waste. This signifies a confidence in continued fertility and prosperity; it is a defiant gesture against the forces of chance and privation. By fearfully scrimping, filling himself up with onionskin and vinegar, Vettidius is refusing to give himself over to the celebration and is still living in fear.

The *dives* is further in violation of the popular festive spirit with his stingy treatment of his slaves. They cheer for their porridge, implying that, on ordinary days, they receive even less.[214] This kind of stinginess, indicative of fear and contrary to the popular festive spirit, is something the Neronian regime set itself in

[214] Conversely, as Harvey (1981:116) suggests, the slaves may be applauding sarcastically, indicating a lack of respect for Vettidius even from slaves.

stark contrast to; it is the meagerness of a fearful time, such as that of Claudius or Tiberius before him.

Socrates continues, imagining another attack from a man-on-the-street, this one aimed at an aristocrat as well. It's likely that we are meant to associate the second victim with Alcibiades himself, since he, like Alcibiades, enjoys a little sunbathing. The abuse has been steadily intensifying throughout the "dialogue," and culminates here with this last imagined speech in the torrent of grotesque imagery of lines 35-41. To begin with, this final speaker doesn't speak at all—he *spits* (*despuat*, line 35). Spitting is a typical bodily act in the image vocabulary of grotesque imagery: "Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing) ... all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world" (Bakhtin, 1968: 317). As an act of expulsion, spitting takes the words of the speaker and physicalizes them, makes them a part of his body that then leaves that body and enters the world. This serves to render the abuse ambivalent as it spews forth from the lower bodily stratum. The abuse, intended as such by the speaker though it is, turns out to be in reality the kind of ambivalent, regenerative abuse typical of the Neronian grotesque. In this passage, we witness a rebirth and renovation of language on multiple levels. The speaker's invocation of *mores* (line 35) identifies him with the kind of oppressive, official cultural outlook deplored and rejected in Satire 1. This invocation of *mores* is not something anyone in the grotesque world wants to hear, and it is identified with senility and grey old age in Satire 1, as it seems to be here in opposition to the young, sun-tanned body of Alcibiades-Nero. As a programmatic demonstration of the Neronian grotesque style

and its power over language and poetry, this passage is meant to deliberately echo the Foil's rant in the more overtly programmatic Satire 1.

The passages share more than is commonly noted. Both begin with the unsolicited intrusion of a stranger. In Satire 1, Persius is trying to compose poetry in the old-fashioned style, but gives it up--no one will listen. At that point, the Foil involves himself, and soon explodes into a vivid, at points obscene rant against the grotesque style that produces ecstatic, sexual effects on its audience. Here, that pattern is echoed as Socrates' sunbathing Alcibiades is minding his own business until the Stranger accosts him out of nowhere, launching into a similarly grotesque, obscene tirade, this time about Alcibiades' body. Both the Foil and the Stranger share the combination of moral outrage and obscene language and imagination, what Bramble (1974: 41-42) calls the "mask of the pervert." Both rants, when taken seriously, have been identified as moralistic tirades against homosexuality and declining *mores*. Both the Foil and the Stranger paint images of bodies that are grotesquely conflated. The Foil in Satire 1.18, describes Persius' grotesque poetry being performed with a *patranti ocello* (orgasming little eye). The audience is also pictured with its *auriculis* (asshole ears) at lines 22 and again at 108. The complement in Satire 4 is Alcibiades' *gurgulio* (windpipe) sticking up out of his crotch at line 38. Likewise, the penetrable asshole ears of Satire 1 are echoed in the transference of *vulvas* to the male anatomy at line 36.

There are also direct verbal echoes, such as *lumbum* at 1.20 and *lumbi* at 4.35; Kißel (1990: 548) notes that this word is more commonly plural, and the use of the more rarified singular in both places suggests a deliberate echo, particularly

when supported by the similar neuter plurals *intima* at 1.21 and *arcana* at 4.35. Both passages suggest penetration--of the audience and of Alcibiades--that leaves the penetrated trembling: *trepidare* in 1.21 and *labefactent* in 4.40. The penetration of the body, the concentration on the material bodily lower stratum, the conflation of head with genitals, the reinvention of the body, all of these are in keeping with grotesque imagery. Persius paints a picture of an objectionable old moralizer and ridicules him by making him seem a hypocrite: so vivid and sexual an imagination--it is important to remember that both scenes are imagined by the speakers, not witnessed--for someone mouthing a moral commonplace like "Hi mores!" But Persius' joke on the old-fashioned, moralizing ranters goes further. By having them spew their abuse using such grotesque imagery, he is proving his point that language and poetry are refreshed, renovated, and reborn. In Satire 4 the locus of the material bodily lower stratum is bathed in sun and superabundant. The focus on the genitals and ass, besides the marketplace level of the humor and language, serves to render the abuse piled on by Socrates' Stranger ambivalent: the objections are rendered ineffectual as true objections or curses by their unbridled fecundity. The generative nature of the material bodily lower stratum, the genitals and ass, is enhanced by the graphic abuse itself.

The crescendo of grotesque language and innovation in this passage and its echoes of the programmatic Satire 1 also suggest a programmatic reading of this passage on another level as well. Alcibiades and Socrates stand as polar opposites physically. Socrates as a grotesque figure in art has already been discussed, and the deliberately controversial features of his portraiture engage with and rebel against

the typical characteristics of classical portraiture--just the kind that would represent and, here, is represented by Alcibiades. The two characters of this dialogue can actually stand as incarnations of the styles that Persius contrasts in Satire 1. Alcibiades then becomes an embodiment of the kind of smoothly perfected heroic poetry that Persius the grotesque poet objects to in that programmatic poem. Alcibiades' extreme care of his physical appearance, then, stands in for the overly refined style that Persius criticizes in Satire 1.

> Sed numeris decor est et iunctura addita crudis.
> cludere sic versum didicit "Berecyntius Attis"
> et "qui caeruleum dirimebat Nerea delphin,"
> sic "costam longo subduximus Appennino."
>
> But elegance and smoothness have been added
> to the raw rhythms of old poetry. That's how "Berecynthian Attis"
> learned how to end the line, and "The dolphin parting azure Nereus,"
> and "We stole a rib from the long Apennines."

Persius' reaction to these lines is telling: "Arma virumque!" He invokes Vergil as a true poet, a contrast to the effete, derivative, contemporary style. It is telling, then, that Socrates in this poem never addresses Alcibiades by name, but only, at line 3, as *magni pupille Pericli* (wardling of Pericles the Great). The diminutive juxtaposed with *magni* draws attention to how little this hero has compared to a hero of old, just as poetically the refined classical style of Persius' day does not compare to the original in Satire 1. His other conclusion about today's poetry, at lines 103-104, is that it has no balls: "haec fierent si testiculi vena ulla paterni/viveret in nobis?" (would these [verses] exist if any throbbing of our father's balls lived in us?). Those balls are conspicuously missing from Alcibiades' anatomy at 4.36, where they have been replaced by *vulvae*!

For his part Socrates, the satyr-like embodiment of the grotesque style, heaps his heroic counterpart with grotesque, ambivalent abuse. The heroic style, the poetic incarnation of official culture, and the heroic looking Alcibiades, physical embodiment of classical tradition and official culture, are dressed down and dismembered, piece by piece, in grotesque Socrates' onslaught that carves its target for the feast and, through his ambivalent grotesque language, brings forth new growth from the death of that old style. It is worth noting too that, in the *Symposium*, Socrates' speech has a physical effect on his listeners:

> ἐγὼ γοῦν, ὦ ἄνδρες, εἰ μὴ ἔμελλον κομιδῇ δόξειν
> μεθύειν, εἶπον ὁμόσας ἂν ὑμῖν, οἷα δὴ πέπονθα αὐτὸς
> ὑπὸ τῶν τούτου λόγων καὶ πάσχω ἔτι καὶ νυνί.
> ὅταν γὰρ ἀκούω, πολύ μοι μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν
> κορυβαντιώντων ἥ τε καρδία πηδᾷ καὶ δάκρυα ἐκχεῖται
> ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων τῶν τούτου· ὁρῶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλους
> παμπόλλους τὰ αὐτὰ πάσχοντας. 215 D-E
>
> As for me, gents, if I wasn't going to seem to be totally drunk, I'd swear to you on all the things I've felt from his words and feel deeply still even now. For whenever I hear him, my heart leaps more than a Corybant's in ecstasy, and tears gush because of his words. And I see many, many others feeling the same things.

Such a physical, ecstatic response from an audience is like the one that Persius' grotesque style provokes in Satire 1. Perhaps the most telling thing of all about the "Socratic dialogue" of Satire 4 is that it isn't a dialogue at all. Every word is voiced by Socrates, his persona shifting and changing, becoming, but always grotesque, always Socrates. Alcibiades, the heroic style, literally has nothing to say.

Socrates closes after his grotesque tirade with a return to the thought that generated the examples: people are too busy striking out at others (instead of looking inwards at themselves), and of course they, too, are open to shots (line 42).

This idea continues the image of the knapsack earlier in the poem. The final maxim returns to grotesque parlance: *respue quod non es* (51). The repetition of a *–spuere* verb calls to mind again the angry diatribe of the second imagined scene and acts as a milder echo of that language, binding together the poem as one consistent utterance of this grotesque Socrates. The beginning of the poem is likewise tied together with verbal echoes, again more muted than during the tirade. At line 5 Socrates asks Alcibiades if prudence has come to him *ante pilos* (before your hairs). Cowherd (1986: 85) notes that, while the initial reading of "hairs" would be "beard," the word choice is "ambiguous; think also 'before pubic hair.'" This reading is supported by the fact that later, at line 37, Alcibiades is described as having a *balanatum gausape* on his jaws. This is more than just a mildly obscene joke, though. Because the *pili* transform from a beard at the first reading to pubic hairs, there is the same kind of conflation with head and crotch that we have seen at line 38, Alcibiades' "unshaved windpipe."

Satire 4 is more than just a multi-layered, literary joke; it's a Saturnalian piece of mockery with a genuine and specific target too. Socrates was made famous by Plato in his dialogues, and that's how most would know him. Socrates talks to people, and they get to talk back. Socrates' famous claim was that he was wise only because he realized he knew nothing. In the "dialogue" that is Satire 4, we have many voices speaking, but they are *all* Socrates. In line 1, Socrates is first put to our minds as the *magistrum barbatum*, unnamed, immediately after Nero, also unnamed, has been conjured by the question *rem populi tractas*? In this way, the Socrates of Satire 4, in all of his grotesque and comic contrast to the Socrates of the

Symposium and the dialogues, is identified with Seneca, Nero's own *magister barbatus*. This identification is not only a logical first thought after line 1, but is supported by the language and by the presence of Socrates in the rest of the poem as well. Kißel (1990: 498) rejects the equation of Socrates with Seneca, but his rejection is based on Persius' reported lack of respect for Seneca in the *Vita* combined with an essentially serious reading of this Socrates in Satire 4. If the Socrates in Satire 4 is meant to be a grotesque version of a philosopher, as his language and behavior suggest, that objection is removed, and Seneca becomes the object of grotesque parody.

Dessen (1968: 104) makes not only the case for Socratic dialogues being well known in first century Rome, but for them being of great importance to the Stoics in particular. She notes that "the Cynic-Stoic Socrates is a familiar figure in Epictetus' *Discourses,* and in one which resembles Persius' fourth Satire, Epictetus quotes the *Alcibiades 1* from memory ... The importance of Socrates in his writings suggests that the Socratic dialogues were an important part of the Stoic curriculum." Dessen makes the argument to further support her contention that Satire 4 is meant as a serious philosophical Socratic-style dialogue. However, rather than ascribing the importance of Socrates to Persius, whose Stoicism is somewhat difficult to detect in this poem and which certainly does not seem to be the focus, perhaps the echo is meant for the (self-proclaimed) Stoic Seneca instead. Seneca, in his *de Vita Beata*, for instance, invokes Socrates to speak on his behalf. At 23.1 the problem of a philosopher enjoying great wealth is posed--a problem Seneca was familiar with. Seneca defends himself first: "Desine ergo philosophis pecunia interdicere; nemo

sapientiam paupertate damnavit" (then stop forbidding philosophers their money; nobody has condemned wisdom to poverty). But later, at 25.4, Seneca invokes Socrates to take up this argument for him:

> Hoc tibi ille Socrates dicet: “Fac me victorem universarum gentium, delicatus ille Liberi currus triumphantem usque ad Thebas a solis ortu vehat, iura reges nationum petant a me; hominem esse maxime cogitabo, cum deus undique consalutabor. Huic tam sublimi fastigio coniunge protinus praecipitem mutationem; in alienum imponar fericulum exornaturus victoris superbi ac feri pompam; non humilior sub alieno curru agar quam in meo steteram.”
>
> ***The*** Socrates will say this to you: "Make me conqueror of the world's nations, let that chariot of luxurious Liber carry me triumphing all the way to Thebes from the far east, let kings of nations ask me for laws; I will especially think that I am human when I am hailed as a god from every direction. To this high so sublime suddenly join a plunging change; I'll be put on someone else's victory float to enhance the parade of the wild and arrogant conqueror; I'll be driven at the foot of another's chariot no more humbly than I had stood in mine."

Whether or not Seneca's reading of Socrates' thought holds water, here we see him closely identifying with the legendary philosopher and "believing" that he'd take his side. An interesting echo with Satire 4 is that both Seneca's Socrates and Persius' are speaking anachronistically within a Roman setting. Persius' Socrates imagines Alcibiades addressing the mob as *Quirites* at line 8, and Seneca's imagines himself participating in a triumph. Seneca's *de Vita Beata* was written in 58 AD, early in Nero's reign and while Persius was flourishing. It seems likely that he would be familiar with it and, supposedly no fan of Seneca, that he would be having some fun at its author's expense. Jenkinson (1973: 525) also makes another interesting connection between the speaker in the satire and Seneca on a stylistic basis. In

discussing the frequent use of indefinite second-person constructions with conditional clauses (*quaesieris* at line 25; *cesses* and *figas* at line 33), he notes that "it is also the case that in Seneca's *Dialogues*, for instance, in which a relatively large number (17) of these expressions occurs and some fifty per cent have an indefinite second-person subjunctive in the protasis, there is no instance at all of a use of the second person singular of the present subjunctive *other* than this use." Thus there are multiple echoes here of Seneca's serious works, called to mind through imagery, language, and style.

Another possible Senecan reference occurs at lines 23-24, the so-called philosophical point of the dialogue: "Ut nemo in sese temptat descendere, nemo,/sed praecedenti spectatur mantica tergo" (nobody tries to get down into himself, nobody,/but the pack on the back of the guy in front of you is being watched*).* Spoken by Socrates in his own voice (most likely), this Aesopan reference tends to be the philosophical life preserver clung to by those who look for that sort of meaning in the poem. Seneca has the same thought, similarly expressed, in his *de Ira* 2.28.8: "aliena vitia in oculis habemus, a tergo nostra sunt" (we hold others' flaws in our eyes, our own on our backs). The original Aesop reference, more closely observed by Persius, has each person walking around with two packs, one containing one's own faults (on the back) and the second containing others' faults on his chest for easy viewing. Both Persius and Seneca make the same simplification: everyone carries only his own flaws on his back and looks at other people's flaws in front of them.

The joke here is that poor young Alcibiades, affairs of state in his control, can't get a word in. Out to enjoy a little sun, he gets an earful of Stoic (maybe?)

maxims and sententious morality, delivered with a healthy dose of bile, from his old teacher. Does Alcibiades ever respond? Ask a question? Persius, I believe, is having a joke at Seneca's expense, painting him as a sententious, pseudo-Stoic moralizer with a bad temper, lurid imagination, and a staunch inability to let his tutee speak. How much of an inside joke would this have been? Does it matter? Persius' "one or two" readers were clearly people in the inner circle, Nero himself and his stable of like-minded artists. But Seneca's reputation was already public enough, both as not-unhypocritical philosopher, writer of the somewhat self-serving *de Vita Beata*, and as Nero's speechwriter, that many reading this would have enjoyed the joke. Socrates-Seneca falls victim to the exact vice that he's moralizing against: a failure to look within (at all those ugly, angry voices) and a misplaced focus on others' knapsacks. Seneca needs to spit out what he isn't (a sententious prig) and join the party that he started with the *Apocolocyntosis*.

Chapter 4: Trimalchio's Bodily Functions and Petronius' *Cena*

Saturnalia and Satire (as we think of it) aren't the same thing, and, in many ways, can be incompatible. In his discussion of the Saturnalian successor, Carnival, Bakhtin makes the distinction clear, noting that the humor of the (modern) satirist is ultimately sterile because it looks down on what it laughs at—it stands apart, lacking the ambivalent stance that incorporates rebirth into the criticism/destruction of the object of laughter. Miller (2005) echoes this sentiment in his many discussions of Roman verse satire (discussed above). I would suggest that there is a ring of truth to this in *our* failure to fully understand and appreciate Petronius' most vivid, and traditionally most despised, character, Trimalchio.

Are we meant to despise Trimalchio? A long tradition of criticism doesn't even bother to tell us so, but just takes it as a given (like our hatred of Nero): "fatuity and bad taste;" "deliberate evocation of the themes of the boorish host;" "ignoramus;" "idiotic;" "ridiculously ostentatious behavior;" "the boorish orchestration of the ostentatious freedman;" "bad taste, pretensions, and foibles."[215] More recently, some appreciation for the show behind Trimalchio's showiness has been expressed by Costas Panayotakis. Panayotakis has observed that "the similarities between Trimalchio's feast and a staged mime transcend mere coincidence" (1995: 54). This gives Trimalchio more credit than he is generally afforded, but even Panayotakis falls into the (here, I would argue, self-contradictory) habit of despising his director: "Petronius, through his vulgar host, has composed the most spectacular dinner of ancient literary fiction" (1995: 57). That's not what Panayotakis says elsewhere: it's Trimalchio who gets credit for composing this feast; that is, Trimalchio is stage-producing the series of dishes and their accompanying drama knowingly. Despite initially rejecting the "ironic tirade of a satirist against the conventional image of a nouveau-riche and his environment in the usual hackneyed manner" (1995: 52), Panayotakis still returns to the idea of Trimalchio as a buffoon by default. I think it is better to carry Panayotakis' sensitive reading of the dinner to its logical conclusion: if the *Cena Trimalchionis* is the "most spectacular dinner of ancient literary fiction," then its host may not be the fool that commentators read him as, and that may be Petronius' intent.

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[215] Sullivan (1963: 89); Walsh (1970: 113); Smith (1975: 148); Boyce (1991: 100); Frangoulidis (2008: 81); Panayotakis (2009: 165); Schmeling (2011: 81).

There are multiple problems with our point-blank despising of Trimalchio. We see him through the eyes of the *Satyricon's* protagonists: Ascyltos, Giton, and, most notably, Encolpius: "That this meal would have been regarded by elegant diners as gluttonous can be inferred not only from a comparison with the dinners recommended by other Roman writers but also by the comments of the narrator during the course of the meal."[216] Where else in the *Satyricon* are we meant to accept their moralizing, their critical faculties, or their evaluation of a character? To say the least, we are dealing with unreliable *arbitri elegantiae,* and we are watching and, more importantly, interpreting Trimalchio and his feast through the eyes of these characters. Here in this passage *their* evaluation of culture, class, and classy, is taken seriously by most critics because it conforms with our desire to find moralism in satire and, if Trimalchio is intended as some sort of cipher for Nero,[217] we need to see him negatively.

Perhaps we should extend the same courtesy (or at least the benefit of the doubt) to Trimalchio that Hooley (2007: 82) does to Nasidienus in Horace's final satire: "At this feast no one behaves well; even Horace, who is not in attendance, adds his bit of Schadenfreude ... For a poet who can tell a good joke, it is remarkable that nothing in this poem is funny; its laughter that only of the pretentious snob." The two pieces are frequently compared,[218] and, considering Petronius' ongoing

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[216] Walsh (1970) 115.
[217] Schmeling, 2011, pg. 81-2, while dispensing with this tradition, can't quite let it go: "Although T. is not (as was once thought) a satirical figure built on Nero, certain incidents, customs, and behavior have close paralells in our records of the Neronian court, so that some indirect ... fun might just possibly be assumed." For the case that Trimalchio is an evocation of Nero, see Walsh (1970) 138-139.
[218] E.G. Walsh (1970) 111-112; Schmeling (2011) 81.

dialogue with the “classics” of the Augustan age, it’s a reasonable comparison to make. Ironically Hooley himself**,** in his nuanced reading of Horace, his sympathetic reading of Nasidienus, makes the comparison, but falls into lock step with the traditional reading of Trimalchio even as he attempts to redeem, in part at least, Nasidienus: "The Petronius parallel is telling; the ludicrous culinary show in his *Satyrica*, "Trimalchio's Feast" as it's commonly called, leads to genuine comic satire; in Horace the laughter is forced and artificial" (2007: 82). Why is it that we are to see in one a well-meaning host who is wronged and in the other a vulgar buffoon ripe for (what we think of as) satire?

There’s a difference between vulgar and funny, but that difference typically lies as much in the attitude of the person hearing the joke or watching the scene as it does in what's being said or presented. Practically since its (re)discovery, we’ve been told by many that Petronius is painting a picture of a vulgar host and his vulgar entertainment—all part of a project to satirize Nero and/or his times. Crum (1951: 162), for example, in comparing Satyricon 53-54, in which an acrobat falls on Trimalchio, to the "Icarus Incident" in Suetonius' *Life of Nero* 12, says that "the passage acquires point, however, if it is an archly framed rapier-thrust at the emperor." In his discussion of Trimalchio's name, he concludes "the combination of names would thus suggest thoughts of crimes and follies of the reigning dynasty, and the name Trimalchio, if of Eastern origin, an Oriental tyrant."

On the other hand, we have scholars like Rose (1966: 291): "Even if we merely show more fully that Petronius was not hostile to Nero, at least this fact eliminates as incorrect a goodly proportion of previous assessments: scholars have very often

looked for the maximum number of indications that Petronius *satirizes* Nero and his times." Rose does in fact demonstrate this fully, succinctly, and convincingly. Then he does so again at greater length five years later.[219] Instead, Petronius has given Trimalchio Neronian characteristics (Rose, 1971: 78, lists many that seem too spot-on to be denied), but the joke is on Trimalchio, not the emperor: "the truth is that Petronius has drawn a comic picture of one who is unutterably vulgar, and part of the humorous portrait is the pathetic attempt of the freedman to appear cultured and a man of taste." Rose even suggests that the correspondences may have been a compliment to Nero.

Nevertheless, the old idea that Nero is the target of a moralist's satire keeps creeping back, as recently as in Hooley (2007: 150): "we expect irony, skepticism, a degree of superior condescension, perhaps particularly with respect to Nero insofar as traces of the man may be discerned in this text;" and "nor does Nero's Rome come off well--and there is the crux. If satire can be said to be a kind of social criticism rendered with a degree of artistically encoded irony, the Satyrica may be fairly said to qualify as satire or satiric fiction" (2007: 154).[220] I would suggest that there are two predispositions at work here that shape our reaction to the *Cena* and to Trimalchio. First, the *Cena* is being read from a stance that privileges elite culture; this feast and its characters aren't like "the classics," so we label it all "vulgar" and the writer a "satirist." The second, of course, is our preprogrammed negative stance

[219] See also Walsh (1970) 138-139; Walsh also details correspondences between Trimalchio and the emperors Claudius and Augustus. Walsh feels that the correspondences between Nero and Trimalchio could in fact have been deemed offensive by the emperor and that "Nero could hardly have been present at a recitation of the *Cena*."

[220] See also Dinter (2012:53).

towards Nero or more recently, since most scholars have been forced to acknowledge the Nero-Trimalchio match up fails as an attack on the emperor, on Neronian culture. Thus we read Petronius as if he were Juvenal: on the outside, looking in, judging negatively and despising his creation's source material. However, close readings of the characters of the *Cena*, combined with a willing suspension of those predispositions, open the door to a reading of Petronius that is funnier, and positive. It's a reading that allows Trimalchio to be in on the joke and puts the *vulgus* back into the vulgar.

A Freedman's Saturnalian Feast

Taking Trimalchio's side is a choice, one that reads against the tradition, but it bears consideration. So what about Encolpius' behavior (and ours) at Trimalchio's feast? He is not much better than party crashers to begin with. Encolpius' invitation, it seems, comes at the hand of a third party, and he looks at it fairly pragmatically, as a *libera cena*, (26.7) without any comment at all on the hospitality or fellowship. But the fact that Encolpius is a party crasher doesn't matter—to Trimalchio. All are invited to this liberal feast, and treated to the best. It's an elitist conceit that extravagance is a bad thing. The guests at Trimalchio's party, most apparently freedmen, enjoy the extravagance and the celebration. It's a freedman's defiant shake of the fist against poverty and servitude. The freedmen get this, enjoy it, relish it. Encolpius and company don't because of their elitist stance. This is clearest in Hermeros' angry outburst at Ascyltos' rude behavior towards his host:

> "Quid rides," inquit, "vervex?[221] An tibi non placent lautitiae domini mei? Tu enim beatior es et convivare melius soles. Ita tutelam huius loci habeam propitiam, ut ego si secundum illum discumberem, iam illi balatum clusissem. Bellum pomum, qui rideatur alios; larifuga nescio quis, nocturnus, qui non valet lotium suum. Ad summam, si circumminxero illum, nesciet qua fugiat. Non mehercules soleo cito fervere, sed in molle carne vermes nascuntur. Ridet! Quid habet quod rideat? Numquid pater fetum emit lamna? Eques Romanus es? Et ego regis filius. 57.2-4
>
> What're you laughing at, you nutless sheep? My host's stylishness not good enough for you? I suppose you're more successful and used to entertaining better. As I hope to have this house's blessing, if I were sitting next to him I would have shut his bleating mouth. A good apple, the one who laughs at other people! Some sneaky runaway, he's not worth his own piss. In a nutshell, if I'm pissed at him, he won't know where to run. Sweet Hercules, I don't get steamed up fast, but worms are born in soft meat. He laughs! What's he got to laugh at? Did his father pay cash for him as a baby? You're a Roman knight? Well then, I'm the son of a king.

Hermeros, like Trimalchio, is rough around the edges. His language is simple and sometimes crude, the language, presumably, of a freedman. His anger is expressed in this manner immediately with the colorful *vervex,* sometimes anemically rendered as "muttonhead." This does capture the proverbial stupidity of the sheep,[222] but the actual meaning is a "castrated sheep." It is typical of the folksy, body-centered vituperation found throughout Neronian satire and, as often, it is based in the agricultural world of Neronian satire's common man. In fact, the clustering of rustic insults, extremely colloquial, may be designed to suggest a

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[221] Ernout's Budé (1990) text chooses *berbex* here (in H), but commentators and editors (Maiuri (1945), Smith (1975), Schmeling (2011)) generally seem to favor *vervex*. Marmorale (1961) likes *berbex*. The meaning is the same.
[222] Schmelling (2011: 231).

certain rusticity in the character here. After *vervex*, Hermeros goes on to assert he'd put a stop to Ascyltos' *balatum*, "bleating," a word generally used literally of animals.[223] He follows with yet another insult at 57.3, this one, according to Adams (1982: 248) having a "proverbial ring:" "larifuga nescio quis nocturnus qui non valet lotium suum" (some fly-by-night runaway who's not worth his own piss). *Lotium* here, "piss," is not only cruder than the polite/common *urina*, it is, before Petronius, used much more commonly in rustic contexts, appearing in Cato and in veterinary works like Vegetius and the *Mulomedicinae Chironis*. A rare non-rustic occurrence is Catullus 39.[224] Isidore (*Etymology* 11.1.138) specifically describes the word as one used by the commoners ("vulgo"). So, out of the gate, we are presented with the outrage of a rough, rustic-speaking man who finds Ascyltos' condescension out of place, inappropriate. The issue of class is raised with great sarcasm: Hermeros' assertion of Ascyltos' equestrian status is not to be taken seriously; "he ridicules Ascyltos because he is putting on airs."[225] But even while bringing Ascyltos down a peg or two, it is clear that Hermeros feels the issue of class acutely. He moves on from there to bring up the big issue, and he does so seriously and sincerely: Hermeros, like Trimalchio, is a freedman, and Ascyltos isn't. Here, Hermeros paints a compellingly sympathetic picture of a freedman and the respect he deserves:

> nunc spero me sic vivere, ut nemini iocus sim. Homo inter
> homines sum; capite aperto ambulo; assem aerarium nemini

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[223] Perrochat (1962: 122). See also TLL, Vol. 2.1691-1692.
[224] Adams (1982: 247-248). I would suggest the Catullan use implies rusticity with its Celtiberian target:
"nunc Celtiber es: Celtiberia in terra,/quod quisque minxit, hoc sibi solet mane/ dentem atque russam defricare gingivam,/ut quo iste vester expolitior dens est,/ hoc te amplius bibisse praedicet loti" (lines 17-21). See also TLL, Vol. 7^2.1682-1683.
[225] Schmeling (2011: 233).

> debeo; constitutum habui nunquam; nemo mihi in foro dixit: 'Redde quod debes'. Glebulas emi, lamellulas paravi; viginti ventres pasco et canem; contubernalem meam redemi, ne quis in illius sinu[226] manus tergeret; mille denarios pro capite solvi; sevir gratis factus sum; spero, sic moriar, ut mortuus non erubescam. (57.4-6)
>
> Now I hope I live in such a way that I'm no man's joke. I am a man among men; I walk around with nothing to hide; I owe no one a cent; I've never had a loan; nobody in the forum has said to me: "Pay what you owe." I bought a piece of ground, put together a little nest-egg; I feed twenty mouths--and one dog. I bought my wife's freedom, so no one could wipe his hands on her lap. I paid the tax on my freedom myself. I became a priest and the fees were waived. I hope I will die in such a way that my corpse won't be blushing.

Assuming he is to be taken literally, he's honest, hardworking, and never in trouble with the law (all things, incidentally, that Ascyltos is not). It's hard to read this passage as tongue-in-cheek, as somehow mocking Hermeros and making his outrage seem ridiculous. We are confirmed in this by Hermeros' resort to the tried-n-true, colloquial proverb of seeing small flaws in others without seeing the big ones in ourselves at 57.7: "In alio peduclum vides, in te ricinum[227] non vides" (you see the louse on another; you don't see the tick on yourself). This more colorful version of the image echoes Persius' backpack image from Satire 4.23-24: "ut nemo in sese temptat descendere, nemo,/sed praecedenti spectatur mantica tergo!" (nobody tries

[226] Instead of *sinu*, the choice of Ernout's Budé edition (1990), other options are *capillis* (add. Burman), favored by Smith (1975) and Schmeling (2011), and *capite* by Maiuri (1945). Marmorale (1961) goes with *sinu*.

[227] *Ricinus*, like other elements of Hermeros' lexicon, is a rustic word, referring specifically to parasites on sheep. The word seems to occur primarily in works like Cato's, Columella's, or Varro's *Agriculture* (OLD, 1653), so the proverbial sound of the statement is made even folksier by the rustic word choice and by the pronunciation *peduclum* for *pediculum*. See Boyce (1991: 37-38) for a full discussion of the vowel shift in common speech and 42-43 for the syncopation, which also occurs earlier with the word *lamna*, "cash," for *lamina*.

to get down into himself--nobody--but oh how that backpack on the guy walking past gets looked at!).[228] This is one of the few statements in Satire 4 that can be taken at some sort of face value (though of course there is irony there as "Socrates" fails to practice what he preaches). The conclusion here though seems clear: any moral authority in this exchange belongs to Hermeros, not Ascyltos, Encolpius or any of his ilk. They are all *lentior non melior* (57.8), "limper, not better," which may be taken as an almost programmatic assessment of elite culture and attitudes in the context of the new Neronian grotesque.

Which is not to say that we are supposed to take Trimalchio seriously, or that his performance throughout the *Cena* is not funny, vulgar, even foolish. Funny, vulgar, and foolish are all part of grotesque, festive culture. The problem lies in Ascyltos and company's elitist look at the feast. They are not in the spirit of the occasion, neither from the standpoint of the guests--it's just a *libera cena*--nor from the festive, Saturnalian spirit which imbues the entire feast. When Hermeros turns on Giton, he calls this holiday directly into play at 58.2: "Io Saturnalia! rogo, mensis December est? Quando vicesimam numerasti? Quid faciat crucis offla, corvorum cibaria" (Ho Saturnalia! I'm asking, is the month December? When did you pay the tax on your freedom? What to do, you little scrap of hanged meat, you crows' food?). Typically, these lines are read negatively—Saturnalia is mentioned as if Giton (who is masquerading as a slave) and Ascyltos were embodying its spirit through their

[228] This sort of idea is a commonplace of folk wisdom; e.g. Catullus 22 lines 20-21 "suus cuique attributus est error;/sed non videmus manticae quod in tergo est" (each is assigned his own fault, but we don't see what's in our backpack).

ridicule of Trimalchio, Hermeros, and the other freedmen at the feast.[229] I think this misunderstands the nature of Saturnalian laughter and misunderstands the character of Hermeros. The laughter of Saturnalia is mutual and shared, not elitist and stifled. The freedman is the emblem of Saturnalia, indicating its antithesis to elitist culture and behavior. Hermeros is not accusing Giton and Ascyltos of behaving as if it were Saturnalia, but of misbehaving at a time of Saturnalia: *Io Saturnalia* is not ironic; it is a reminder of the spirit of the entire feast and possibly a reminder of the actual holiday taking place itself. The question *mensis December est*? is neutral; the answer "no" typically understood is based on a negative reading of this feast and, to some extent, an identification with the elitism of Ascyltos, Giton and Encolpius. At the beginning of this fragment[230] of the *Satyricon* (26.7), Encolpius reports, "Venerat iam tertius dies, id est expectatio liberae cenae" (the third day had already come, that is, the promise of a free dinner). No one knows what exactly *tertius dies* means in this fragmentary context: Schmeling (2011: 83) sums up the commentators' problem: "The immediate question is: the third day after what?"[231] It seems possible, given the unknown timeframe and the likeliness of a lacuna, that we are in fact in the middle of some sort of festival, perhaps Saturnalia itself, and that the days of that festival are being marked here. Trimalchio, then, is *Saturnalius rex* of this feast, and is willingly, not unwittingly,

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[229] Schmeling (2011: 240).
[230] According to Jones (1988: 61), "MS evidence and a letter from Poggio suggest that *venerat iam tertius dies* began Book XIV." Schmeling (2011: 82-83) notes the possibility of a lacuna and the various speculations about where the *Cena* might fall within Book 15.
[231] Courtney (2001: 72) suggests it is an enumeration of the days of Quartilla's abuse; Schmeling (2011: 83) notes that most assume the "what" is a conversation with Agamemnon, but notes the problems with this scenario.

playing the fool. It's a joke, a series of jokes, that everyone is to share in with the understanding that the fool is only playing a role.

Saturnalia is, in many ways, about inversion of society, but, in other ways, it is very much about leveling it, as we have seen. We have the less well-known (but perhaps more likely) tradition of a shared feast between master and slave, for instance; at Saturnalia, all traditionally wear the *pilleus*, the freedman's cap, regardless of status. This accounts for Hermeros' anger in general but also for the very specific focus of his diatribe on who is freed and who is free. Ascyltos and Giton (status unknown to Hermeros) are *acting* like free men among freedmen; they are elitist and condescending. Their behavior, whether or not status might entitle them to it, is unconvivial in the context of this freedman's feast, and I suggest that the entire episode is to be viewed as a performance of that holiday, in spirit or in reality.

A Saturnalian feast is ideally suited to a hybrid cast of slaves, freedmen, and *ingenui* all sharing the same table, the seating arrangements not reflective of social status. The exchange, for instance, between Hermeros and Encolpius at 58.3 serves to illustrate the classless arrangement of the feast, if not the attitude of the feasters:

> Ita satur pane fiam, ut ego istud conliberto meo dono, alioquin iam tibi depraesentiarum reddidissem. Bene nos habemus, at isti nugae, qui tibi non imperant. Plane qualis dominus, talis et servus**.**
>
> As I hope to have enough bread, I'm letting this go for my fellow-freedman's sake, else I'd have given you what you deserve right now. We're all having fun, but these guys who aren't reining you in are idiots. Yep: like master, like slave.

Hermeros' assumption that Giton is a slave and that Ascyltos and Encolpius are free is clear from his word choice, indicating the (presumed) presence of freeborn**,** slave, and freedman all sitting at the same table. This social leveling is typical—probably archetypical—of a Saturnalian feast, and Hermeros' anger at Giton and Encolpius is focused on their snobbery, which is an affront to the spirit of the feast.

One of the centerpieces of the feast is the roast pig that is produced in 40.3:

> Secutum est hos repositorium, in quo positus erat primae magnitudinis aper, et quidem pilleatus, e cuius dentibus sportellae dependebant duae palmulis textae, altera caryotis, altera thebaicis repleta. Circa autem minores porcelli ex coptoplacentis facti, quasi uberibus imminerent, scrofam esse positam significabant. Et hi quidem apophoreti fuerunt.
>
> A platter followed them, in which had been placed a boar of impressive size, and it was wearing a freedman's hat. Two little baskets woven from palms were hanging from its tusks, one full of sweet Syrian dates and the other dry Egyptian ones. And all around very small piglets made of pastry dough, as if they were eager for its udders, indicated a sow had been served. These in fact were party favors.

The pig appears *pilleatus*, wearing a freedman's hat. A joke is made about the pig escaping his fate the day before, but the image of the centerpiece of the feast dressed in Saturnalian hat and appearing as a freedman surely indicates a Saturnalian spirit for the entire occasion. Likewise the pastry *porcelli* are reminiscent of the poor man's *sigilla*, the traditional Saturnalia gifts, since those who couldn't afford to purchase statuettes found their equivalent at the bakery. The pastry piglets, further, are suckling her. But there's more (isn't that always the case *chez* Trimalchio?): this boar is not only suckling piglets, but pregnant ... with thrushes. Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 3.13, mentions a dish called "porcus Troianus," so

called because "aliis inclusis animalibus gravidum, ut ille Troianus equus gravidus armatis fuit" (it's pregnant with other animals inside, just like the Trojan horse was pregnant with armed men). The dish is perfect for a Saturnalian type feast: it degrades a heroic myth while simultaneously symbolizing birth in the context of the feast. In a multi-leveled *iunctura acris* this pig is stuffed with the even more unexpected. She is super-abundant, simultaneously suckling and giving birth, but the appearance of the live birds is a further extension of the unexpected. The images here are liminal—life and birth even as the pig is carved up for the feast. These images of life and birth go hand-in-hand with a feast as a defiance of winter and death and are perfectly appropriate in the context of Saturnalia.

It's hard not to jump and see in that pig-freedman centerpiece the freedman-pig that's presiding over it, Trimalchio. But is that necessarily a negative image in the context of the web of grotesque, popular imagery? The pig is the feast, part of the overabundance that inspires the rejoicing and defies winter, hunger, and death--the things that the Saturnalian holiday, for the *vulgus*, guards against. But the pig is more, since it serves as one of the key props in Trimalchio's next performance of Saturnalian *libertas*:

> Dum haec loquimur, puer speciosus, vitibus hederisque redimitus, modo Bromium, interdum Lyaeum Euhiumque confessus, calathisco uvas circumtulit, et poemata domini sui acutissima voce traduxit. Ad quem sonum conversus Trimalchio: "Dionyse, inquit, liber esto." Puer detraxit pilleum apro capitique suo imposuit. Tum Trimalchio rursus adiecit: "Non negabitis me, inquit, habere Liberum patrem." Laudamus dictum Trimalchionis, et circumeuntem puerum sane perbasiamus. (41.6-8)

> While we were discussing this, a nice-looking boy, wreathed with vine leaves and ivy, imitating Dionysus in his various guises--first "Boisterous", then "Loose" and "Loud"--brought around grapes in a basket and performed his master's poetry in a very high voice. At this sound Trimalchio turned: "Dionysus, be 'Free'." The boy took the freedman's cap off the boar and put it on his own head. Then Trimalchio tossed off another: "You can't deny it: I have a Free Father." We praised Trimalchio's remark and gave the boy a big kiss as he came around.

This is indeed a festive occasion! Trimalchio has, of course, stage-managed this elaborate joke, but it's a joke that is in keeping, on multiple levels, with Saturnalian spirit and a joke that would also have real meaning to the majority of his guests, freedmen like himself and, now, this boy. Bodel (1984) sees in this scene more than just word play; he reads the scene (and the entire *Cena*) as an illustration of the frustrations and plight of the freedman. It is a reading that goes beyond the typical notion that Petronius is mocking or "satirizing" opulent freedmen, but it does leave questions. Are the jokes meant for the guests, and the "message" for a reader who is elite but sympathetic to the freedman's plight? The plight he describes (1984: 211), I would argue, is actually questionable: "having recognized what he believed to be the reason for the ostentatious materialism displayed by many freedmen, Petronius in the *Cena* developed the theme that Trimalchio's 'vulgar' attitudes and behavior are explainable by the nature of a freedman's status, which is immutable and inescapable." Bodel sees Petronius' portraits of freedmen as individualized and sympathetic. But I would argue that freedmen in the *Cena* are instead being used as an invocation of Saturnalian spirit and, to the contrary, as an expression of the Neronian grotesque in their *mutable* status. Bodel is still, ultimately, judging these

characters as vulgar fools; he just feels sorry for them for it, and thinks Petronius does too. I believe his sympathetic view of freedmen (and of Petronius' portrayal of them) is correct, but as is common in grotesque literature, the laughter and joy are lost in the confusion of what official culture would term "ugly" or, in this case, "vulgar." An example of this reading is Courtney's (2001: 90): he notes that Encolpius is embarrassed about missing the joke twice in a row lest he seem not to have dined in "respectable company. This is of course ironical; ... it is an odd kind of 'respectable company' which can be expected to key into such 'freedman-humour.'" The freedman, because he is not "respectable," is dismissed by elite culture and those predisposed to sympathize with it. But "freedman-humor" is just the kind of revitalized laughter that makes the *Cena* such a vivid success.

Moreover there is no indication that the "ostentatious materialism" during Nero's reign was limited to freedmen. That's one reason why the identification of Trimalchio with Nero[232] lasted, and then morphed into a satiric condemnation of Neronian society. On the other hand, the kind of materialism being looked down on here is a natural extension of festive behavior. At the time of Saturnalia, abundance and overindulgence represent victory, life, and the confidence of change and growth. The freedmen's status was only "immutable" in a very narrow social sense. At this feast, in a moment, Trimalchio has treated his guests to a display of just how mutable a man's life can be--a slave has been freed amidst laughter and celebration. A freedman is a slave in the process of becoming a Roman, a living *iunctura acris* of slave and citizen. For this change to be fully accomplished, a generation must pass,

[232] Many of the examples gathered by Rose (1971: 82-86) involve similar expenditures, luxuries, and indulgences between the emperor and Trimalchio.

but the children of freedmen are, ultimately, citizens of Rome. Trimalchio's joke about having a free father (not a bad play on words, incidentally) isn't an expression of a subconscious yearning. It is laughter at the dark past of servitude and exultant joy over the very mutable state of slaves and freedmen like him. The pig in the freedman's cap, then, is a nexus of imagery pertinent to the Neronian grotesque: a Saturnalian feast complete with party favors, including porcine *sigilla*, and a freedman that provides the symbol of liberation, also the customary garb of Saturnalia, to a slave in the middle of a series of puns.

This boar is referenced again later when a second roast pig--even larger than the first--is brought in:

> Nondum efflaverat omnia, cum repositorium cum sue ingenti mensam occupavit. Mirari nos celeritatem coepimus et iurare, ne gallum quidem gallinaceum tam cito percoqui potuisse, tanto quidem magis, quod longe maior nobis porcus videbatur esse, quam paulo ante aper fuerat. Deinde magis magisque Trimalchio intuens eum: “Quid? Quid? Inquit porcus hic non est exinteratus? Non mehercules est. Voca, voca cocum in medio.” Cum constitisset ad mensam cocus tristis et diceret se oblitum esse exinterare: “Quid? Oblitus?” Trimalchio exclamat, “Putes illum piper et cuminum non coniecisse. Despolia.” Non fit mora, despoliatur cocus atque inter duos tortores maestus consistit. Deprecari tamen omnes coeperunt et dicere: “Solet fieri; rogamus, mittas; postea si fecerit, nemo nostrum pro illo rogabit.” Ego, crudelissimae severitatis, non potui me tenere, sed inclinatus ad aurem Agamemnonis “Plane, inquam, hic debet servus esse nequissimus; aliquis oblivisceretur porcum exinterare? Non mehercules illi ignoscerem, si piscem praeterisset.” At non Trimalchio, qui relaxato in hilaritatem vultu: “ergo," inquit, "quia tam malae memoriae es, palam nobis illum exintera.” Recepta cocus tunica cultrum arripuit porcique ventrem hinc atque illinc timida manu secuit.

> Nec mora, ex plagis ponderis inclinatione crescentibus thumatula[233] cum botulis effusa sunt. (49)
>
> The blowhard still hadn't finished, when a platter with a tremendous pig took over the table. We began to marvel at the speed and to swear that even a chicken couldn't be cooked so fast, even more so because the pig seemed way bigger to us than the boar had been a little earlier. Then Trimalchio, inspecting it more and more, said, "What? What?! This pig hasn't been gutted? Sweet Hercules, it isn't. Get the cook front and center." When the sad-looking cook stood at the table and said he had forgotten to gut it, Trimalchio shouted, "What? Forgot? You'd think he hadn't added pepper and cumin! Strip him." There's no pause, the cook is stripped and stands there mournfully between two Punishers. But we all began to plead for him and say, "It happens. Let him go for us. If he does it again, none of us will stick up for him." I--of much sterner stuff--was not able to hold back, but leaned over and said into Agamemnon's ear, "This guy has got to be the worst slave ever; could someone forget to gut a pig? Sweet Hercules, I wouldn't let him off if he had skipped that on a fish." But not Trimalchio: his face softened into a big smile and he said, "Since you acknowledge you were wrong, gut it right in front of us." The cook got his shirt back and grabbed a knife and slit the pig's stomach here and there with a shaky hand. Right away out of the slits, getting bigger because of the pressure of the weight inside, sausages and puddings came pouring out.

This pig, too, has his connections directly to Trimalchio, for this pig is supposedly incorrectly prepared, no good. The chef has forgotten to clean it properly, making it unfit for the table. This, however, is part of another elaborate performance, a joke. The carver is ordered to gut the pig at the table (rude! tasteless! inept!), and when

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[233] For a complete rundown of the manuscript differences over this word, see Schmeling (2011: 113). The restoration of the manuscript-supported *thumatula* over *tomacula* begins with Alessio (1960: 367-372) and Pellegrino (1975: 254). Schmeling notes that the recorrection to *thumatala* has gained traction more recently, appearing in the Teubner editions of Satyricon post 1995. Ernout's Budé edition has *tomacula* here.

he does so it disgorges sausages[234] and puddings rather than entrails. In effect, the feast is stuffed with yet more, and it's all good food, presented in a way that plays with the tasteless but is actually just a fun performance to act as sauce for the main dish. Trimalchio the freedman-pig, the living *porcus Troianus*, ought to be seen in this light. He is part of an elaborate performance-joke, which he himself has staged. Panayotakis (1995: 78-83) rightly interprets this entire vignette as a carefully staged farce, masterminded by Trimalchio. As an entertainer, Trimalchio has talent: "it is remarkable that everyone in the company is so involved in watching the whole performance that no-one dares to doubt Trimalchio's intentions ... the scene is enacted in such a masterly way that it evokes the audience's live participation" (1995: 81). Schmeling (2011: 208) adds that the passage has similarities to Terence's *Phormio* as well. In short, Trimalchio need not be seen as a fool or buffoon, though he talks and acts like one. Behind that persona is a stage director and a comic writer, a clever host presiding over a feast designed to surprise, trick, and entertain. Trimalchio's performance as a *mimus* also grounds him in the popular traditions of the marketplace, and thence the grotesque: "it is a fair assumption that the *mimi*, including the *scurrae*, of ancient Rome graduated to the stage from the street."[235] Trimalchio's festive show is one that has its origins in the marketplace, designed to make *his* audience, mostly freedmen, laugh. Encolpius and

[234] Bodel (1989: 358-359) reads *thumatala* as derived from θύμον, thyme, concluding that they are sausages made with that herb. However, Pellegrino (1975: 254) derives the term from θύματα, "sacrificial cakes shaped like animals." While Bodel's derivation is probably the correct one (Schmeling agrees with it), since "entrails" are spilling out of the pig, it's not impossible, I think, that this could be an echo of the earlier pig suckling pastry-piglets. If that's the case, this pig is pregnant, adding another grotesque layer of ambivalent death-birth imagery to the feast.
[235] Corbett (1986: 57).

company's negative reaction to it is a reaction from the point of view of elite culture, a point of view that we should question here.

Trimalchio's demeanor, his behavior, everything he does is suggestive of a performance of the *Saturnalius Rex* on a grand scale. Trimalchio takes the jokes and riddles that are traditionally part of the Saturnalian feast[236] and elaborates them, weaving them into every aspect of the festive occasion. Symphosius, writing most likely in the late fourth or early fifth century, has left a book of 100 three-verse riddles. His book begins with a preface, in which he sets the context of the riddles as a Saturnalian *cena*.

> Annua Saturni dum tempora festa redirent
> perpetuo semper nobis sollemnia ludo,
> post epulas laetas, post dulcia pocula mensae,
> deliras inter vetulas puerosque loquaces,
> cum streperet late madidae facundia linguae,
> tum verbosa cohors studio sermonis inepti
> nescio quas passim magno de nomine nugas
> est meditata diu; sed frivola multa locuta est.
> Nec mediocre fuit; magni certaminis instar,
> ponere diverse vel solvere quaeque vicissim. (Praefatio 3-12)

> The festival of the Saturnalia was back,
> always for us a sacred time of continuous play,
> after the abundant feast, after the dinner's sweet drinks,
> among silly old women and chatty boys,
> when all around the eloquence of drunken tongues made a ruckus
> then the talkative bunch in their eagerness for low-brow chit-chat
> puzzled a long time over some silly little jokes
> with pretentions. They said a lot of lame things.
> And this wasn't a small deal; more like a major competition,
> each one in turn posing and solving on all kinds of topics.

The passage sheds light on Trimalchio's feast in two ways. First, it closely associates riddles and related kinds of play as an integral part of Saturnalian festivity. But it

[236] See Versnel (1993: 148);

also indicates different attitudes towards this kind of play. Symphosius in this passage, for all of his protestation of Saturnalian spirit in line 4, seems to set himself apart from the other guests. *Deliras*, *loquaces*, *madidae*, *verbosa*, *inepti*, and *frivola* all have the ring of superiority to them, and his hexameter riddles, with allusions to Vergil and Horace,[237] seem to be his alternative to what was offered at the feast.[238] Symphosius, the *scholasticus*,[239] looks down on Saturnalian fun, just as the "*scholastici*" at Trimalchio's feast do. On the other hand, Symphosius reports that the guests make a big deal out of the fun. From his point of view, this is a kind of pretentiousness (*magno de nomine*, *magni certaminis instar*), but that is the point of view of elite culture. We see a picture of this dynamic beginning at 56.7 when Trimalchio brings out the actual, customary *apophoretae*, along with riddles as labels for the gifts:[240] "Iam etiam philosophos de negotio deiciebat, cum pittacia in scypho circumferri coeperunt, puerque super hoc positus officium apophoreta recitavit" (he was already putting the philosophers out of a job too, when they started bringing round tickets in a cup, and a slave in charge of all this announced the party favors). There follows a fairly long list of paired riddle-tickets and favors,

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[237] See Theodore (1928: 19) on riddles 13, 42, 56, 77, 95.
[238] Plutarch takes a dim view of dinner party riddlers too. In *Moralia* 673 A (Book 5 of *Table Talk*), he notes that the "οἱ φορτικοὶ καὶ ἀφιλόλογοι" (*common, unliterary types*) turn to "αἰνίγματα καὶ γρίφους," (*riddles and puzzles*) instead of more serious, erudite topics of conversation.
[239] See Theodore (1928: 15): "The spirit in which Symphosius wrote, in so far as can be judged from his brief preface, his subject matter and his handling of it, make him a kindred with the late fourth and early fifth century 'scholastics' such as Ausonius, Macrobius, and Martianus Capella."
[240] According to Suetonius, *Life of the Divine Augustus,* 75, Augustus did the same thing at the Saturnalia, varying the quality of his gifts (the low-end ones included sponges and tongs) and giving them tickets with riddles and misleading descriptions.

such as "'Muraena et littera': murem cum rana alligatum fascemque betae." Most of the punning jokes are untranslatable, but they rely on word play (both Latin and Greek) of pretty much the same quality throughout. "Muraena"=**mu**rem + **rana**; "beta" is both the second letter in the Greek alphabet and the word for "beets" in Latin. Encolpius finishes *his* list of these gift-riddles and adds, "Diu risimus: sexcenta huiusmodi fuerunt, quae iam exciderunt memoriae meae" (we laughed for a long time: there were hundreds like this, which have already slipped my mind). The disregard expressed here, the standing apart from the fun, is again reminiscent of Symphosius:

> Ast ego, ne solus foede tacuisse viderer,
> qui nihil adtuleram mecum quod dicere possem,
> hos versus feci subito de carmine vocis.
> Insanos inter sanum non esse necesse est.
> Da veniam, lector, quod non sapit ebria Musa. (Praefatio 13-17)
>
> But I, who'd brought nothing with me to make a riddle of,
> composed these verses from their off-the-cuff ditties.
> so people don't think I alone had bad manners and had nothing to say.
> You have to not have sense among the senseless.
> Pardon, dear reader, the bad taste of a drunken Muse.

Maybe Symphosius behaves a little better, but it's only so people won't think ill of him. Like Encolpius and co. he's brought nothing to the party, and judges it and those who enjoy it from on high. Even the gift-riddles he offers up *post factum* are not for them, but for his readers, who in turn may judge *him*! Encolpius' laughter isn't festive laughter, it's mockery. Ascyltos goes even further, provoking Hermeros' angry outburst. Like the crowd at Symphosius' party, Hermeros thinks his fun deserves more credit, and is gravely insulted when his "pretentions" (from the point

of view of Ascyltos, Giton, and Encolpius) are shattered. How does he put them in their place? With riddles:

> Ad summam, si quid vis, ego et tu sponsiunculam: exi,
> defero lamnam. Iam scies patrem tuum mercedes
> perdidisse, quamvis et rhetoricam scis. Ecce:
> "Qui de nobis? longe venio, late venio? solve me."
> Dicam tibi, qui de nobis currit et de loco non movetur;
> qui de nobis crescit et minor fit. Curris, stupes, satagis,
> tanquam mus in matella. Ergo aut tace aut meliorem
> noli molestare (58.8-9)
>
> In fact, if you want, you and I--a little bet: come on,
> here's my cash. Now you'll see your father wasted his
> money, even though you know your books. Here:
> "I'm a part of us. I come far, I come wide. What am I?"
> I'll tell you this: what part of us runs and does not move;
> what part of us grows and becomes smaller. You're on
> the run, you're slack-jawed, you're out of your league,
> like a mouse in the john. So shut up and don't bother
> your betters.

For Hermeros, there's no place in this festive context for the supposed learnedness and the manifest snobbiness of Ascyltos and Giton. The rules of this kind of fun are different, and to Hermeros they are the rules of a game indeed *magni certaminis instar*.

The riddle is an ideal grotesque rendering of language, for it reinvents language and makes it new. A riddle is language at a liminal state, in the process of becoming. Hermeros' riddle serves as an example: the language itself is a hybrid sort of linguistic monster, for there is more than one meaning to this, and really to any, riddle. Schmeling (2011: 243) proposes that "it is likely that many riddles have both an obscene and a decent answer." Here, the proposed solutions are "shadow" and "penis." Of course, the obscene answer takes the already grotesque language and materializes it through the body, rendering it doubly grotesque.

So throughout the feast, Trimalchio takes the idea of Saturnalian riddles further by melding them with the actual meal. The food itself becomes an instrument for puns, riddles, and punch line surprises at Trimalchio's feast. The Zodiac dish is perhaps the best example of Trimalchio's multi-layered approach to cuisine as Saturnalian performance. He begins with a dish that is not especially appetizing, adding a layer of jokes, most of them real groaners, some indecipherable to us (that should be a clue to withhold judgment, though people rarely do). Each food dish is associated with a sign of the Zodiac, and acts as a sort of riddle: "how is a wreath of flowers like the sign of the Crab?" The answers are punch lines, but not the *real* punch line. Like the pig-freedman, the *Saturnalius rex*, there is something not-too-appetizing about this dish on the surface, and that is revealed to be the real joke, the joke whose punch line is yet another bounty of delicious food. The Zodiac riddles and the one about the pig in the *pilleus* are, debatably, not that funny. Critics have consistently found them wanting, though the only objections from the actual feasters come from our elitist protagonists. Whether they are or not, though, is beside the point. Taking them as groaners, they still operate on the same level as the not-too-appetizing part of the feast: the Zodiac dishes and the un-cleaned pig. All of that is misdirection for the real joke/feast that lies within and underneath, to the undeniable delight of (the majority of) the guests.

Trimalchio the *Saturnalius Rex*

There are enough contradictions in the characterization of Trimalchio himself to raise questions about how we are to feel about him, to at least call into question our reaction to him as some kind of vulgar buffoon. There are in fact

indications that we ought to view Trimalchio as we view his dishes: he's a little unappealing, crude, inappropriate on the surface, but the real joke is that what you see isn't really what you get. Trimalchio is performing as a Saturnalian fool, and the people who are present and in the spirit of the Saturnalian feast get and enjoy the joke. Our protagonists take Trimalchio at face value and find him distasteful, just as they did the Zodiac dish at first. Their elitist perspective (are we really supposed to share it?) prevents them from seeing Trimalchio's *performance* as a fool. Ultimately the joke's on them, and on us if we're in their camp.

An excellent example of Trimalchio's performance as a fool is the passage in which he demonstrates an absolute lack of control of classical mythology in chapter 59.4-5:

> "Scitis, inquit, quam fabulam agant? Diomedes et Ganymedes duo fratres fuerunt. Horum soror erat Helena. Agamemnon illam rapuit et Dianae cervam subiecit. Ita nunc Homeros dicit, quemadmodum inter se pugnent Troiani et Parentini. Vicit scilicet, et Iphigeniam, filiam suam, Achilli dedit uxorem. Ob eam rem Aiax insanit."
>
> "Do you know," he said, "what story they're doing? The Medes boys--Dio and Gany--were two brothers. Their sister was Helen. Agamemnon stole her and substituted a deer for her as a sacrifice to Diana. So Homer now tells how The Trojans and the Parentines are fighting each other. He won of course, and gave his daughter Iphigenia to Achilles as wife. Ajax went insane because of this."

Typically, this is taken as a sign that we are to understand Trimalchio as an uncultured buffoon, and critics follow up their harsh words with, inevitably, the "real myth." But why take Trimalchio seriously here? His mythological malapropisms are part of a larger performative context: the crowd has just been "treated" to a recitation of Homer, which even the pseudo-cultivated Encolpius

resents because they recite in Greek *insolenter* (what else could they recite Homer in?). Trimalchio provides the Latin subtitles by reading from a book. It seems strange that, book-in-hand, Trimalchio could become so badly confused about the mythology. More likely, this is a joke typical of Trimalchio: a combination of bad jokes and allusions leading up to another feasting element. Trimalchio's mishandling of mythology is funny to everyone because everyone knows these stories. According to the traditional take on Trimalchio, he is supposed to be a nouveau riche buffoon because he doesn't know/understand the mythology that is part of elite culture, but the assumption that myth is the (sole) property of elite culture is mistaken. There is ample evidence that mythology was well known to all strata of society, so to claim it as elite to prove Trimalchio a clod involves multiple assumptions. Instead, what we have is a sequence typical of Trimalchio's performative, festive style: something that is supposed to be appetizing, but isn't, in this case a Homeric recitation, the stuffing of which is quickly let out by Trimalchio's –very conscious—"butchering" of the mythological subject. But all of these are misdirection leading to the surprise riddle that is yet another joke: a boiled calf brought in for an Ajax to carve in a (correct) allusion to the real story of Ajax's madness in which he attacks and slaughters herds of livestock. All of this works not by assuming Trimalchio and his ilk are ignorant of mythology but that they are conversant enough in it to play, parody, and allude to it and, just maybe, elite culture in general. Almost inevitably, Seneca's account (*Ep*. 27.5-8) of Calvisius Sabinus, rich but not as sharp as he could be, is invoked in conjunction with this scene. This fellow, because of the unfortunate combination of a faulty memory and a desire to

appear learned, bought slaves to recite Homer and other poets to guests. He would annoy his guests by having them recite and then repeating, but always forgetting the lines midway through. There are similarities here, of course, and the comparison is attractive because of Seneca's description of Calvisius: "patrimonium habebat libertini et ingenium" (he had the inheritance of a freedman--and his intellect). But the comparison is perhaps made too quickly. Seneca, in this letter, is something of a snob, and his voice reminds us of Encolpius' in his description of a guest's discomfiture. This is augmented by his self-satisfied comparison of himself to Calvisius: "huic memoria tam mala erat, ut illi nomen modo Vlixis excideret, modo Achillis, modo Priami, quos tam bene quam paedagogos nostros novimus" (this guy's memory was so poor that he would forget Ulysses' name at one point, Achilles' at another, at another Priam's, ones we know as well as our own nanny). But Seneca, as we have seen and shall see again, in his mode as the Neronian Socrates, is not excluded from targeting for some deflating laughs by the Neronian grotesque. More importantly, though, Trimalchio's show here isn't really like Calvisius'. The *Homeristae* are doing the recitation and, importantly I think, not for very long. Encolpius tells us that Trimalchio begins glossing the performance *mox silentio facto* (59.3). This bombastic Homeric recital is abbreviated, cut short by Trimalchio's insertion of his own reinvented mythology and the culmination in the boiled calf's head. The point here is not a demonstration of learning, but a parody of high culture on Trimalchio's part leading up to the usual punch line, a continuation of the feast.

Trimalchio's understanding of mythology is solid when it cross-pollinates with a food joke. Another example of appropriate and correct allusion to mythology,

also culinary, occurs at 47.10, in a much more offhand way, as Trimalchio remarks, "Gallum enim gallinaceum, penthiacum et eiusmodi nenias rustici faciunt" (hicks make chicken *à la chic*, Pentheus hash, and junk like that). This suggests that mythology was known well enough by the everyday folk that a joke like "Pentheus hash" could be made and even become a commonplace—it is unglossed by Trimalchio, indicating a "goes without saying" familiarity with the subject.

Trimalchio has been called a stage manager[241] and his feast is a sort of "mime," a popular form of entertainment perfectly in keeping with Trimalchio's primary audience. But this metaphor generally seems to be taken as operating more on Petronius' level than on Trimalchio's. That is, Trimalchio is a stage manager, but he himself doesn't seem to know it (he is, after all, a vulgar buffoon). But, if Trimalchio is instead presiding as *Rex* over his Saturnalian feast, this allows him to consciously be orchestrating the show and, one may presume, to be playing a character. Trimalchio is playing a Saturnalian fool, and his guests, aside from the protagonists, get it because they are in the spirit of the occasion and not acting as elite outsiders. This allows Trimalchio to modulate his performance, flowing from buffoon (funny because we know it's Saturnalian play-acting) to the real punch lines that take the piss out of the elitists and offer everyone a good joke in the form of a never-ending bounty of good food.

Trimalchio's language is a good indication that he is, at times, *playing* the fool. Petronius, who vividly creates his characters at the *Cena* through the use of language, is far from univocal in his "freedman" speech, incorporating a wide range

[241] E.g. Frangoulidis (2008).

of elements of “vulgar” speech to varying degrees in his speeches to create a range of characters among his freedmen. Among his instruments of characterization for Trimalchio are the hyper-urbanisms and hyper-corrections that pepper his speech through most of the *Cena*. An example of the type of affect Trimalchio indulges in is his pronunciation of the vowel sound -i- in hiatus. Boyce (1991: 40) notes that in popular speech "*e* or *i* directly followed by another vowel tended to be reduced in pronunciation to the semivowel [y], generally represented orthographically by *i.*" However, Trimalchio hyper-corrects this type of vulgar pronunciation. One example of this noted by Boyce (1991: 99) occurs in the word *Corinthius* (at 50.2 and two times at 50.4) where Trimalchio pronounces the word *Corintheus*.[242] Thus Trimalchio is affecting what he considers to be an elite accent. He also is hyperurbane in his grammar and syntax, using, for instance, subjunctive verbs where indicatives are grammatically appropriate. These and other types of hypercorrect or hyperurbane pronunciations and constructions coexist with the type of popular "mistakes" in speech and occur in the same sentences. Thus, Trimalchio's speech is its own form of *iunctura acris*, a hybrid, grotesque language that fuses mock-elite and vulgar. The effect can be startling, and it is always funny. Generally it is assumed that Petronius is using this blend of hyperurbanisms and vulgarities as a characterization of Trimalchio, the freedman, as a pompous fool aspiring to higher rungs of culture and cultured speech. It is a negative

[242] Boyce further notes that Encolpius, unlikely to engage in such hypercorrection, says "Corinthius" at 31.9 and 50.4. He also provides further examples of hypercorrect pronunciation; he also provides morphological examples of hypercorrection such as neuter forms for masculine or feminine nouns and passive (=deponent) forms of verbs in place of regular active forms.

characterization therefore: the narrator intends for us to enjoy his joke at the expense of the character and, according to the rules of "satire," people of his ilk in Neronian society.[243] An interesting thing occurs, though, at 71, when Trimalchio is discussing his eventual demise. As Trimalchio describes his will and funerary monuments, suddenly "vulgarisms are strikingly absent" (Boyce, 1991: 102). Trimalchio no longer sounds the fool, at least in terms of his grammar, syntax, etc. His language is plain but syntactically correct, serious, at times transcendent of the rest of the freedman speech found in the *Cena*. In this one passage, for instance, Trimalchio uses several grammatical forms that do not otherwise appear in his speech (or for the most part in any other freedman's speech in the *Cena*): At 71.7, Trimalchio uses a gerundive: "Valde enim falsum est vivo quidem domos cultas esse, non curari eas, ubi diutius nobis **habitandum** est;" this construction occurs only one other time, at 62.1 in Niceros' speech.[244] He also, at 71.8, uses the only supine form to appear in a freedman's speech: "ne in monumentum meum populus **cacatum** currat." Finally, in this speech alone Trimalchio uses participial phrases, unlike any of the freedmen, Trimalchio included, throughout the rest of the *Cena* (Boyce, 1991: 102). Freedmen consistently only use participles as adjectives (a trend towards their use in Romance languages later on),[245] so the sudden appearance of "classically" and correctly used participles is a significant shift. Boyce attributes this

[243] Schmeling (2011: 81), for example.
[244] Boyce (1991) incorrectly cites the passage as 61.1.
[245] Boyce, (1991: 72) cites Nelson (1947: 167) (writing in Dutch): "in the use of participles, gerundives, and supines Petronius draws a clear distinction between educated and vulgar diction: the latter has very few participles and hardly any gerundives and supines, except in standing idiomatic phrases." From the English Summary of Nelson (1947: 208).

shift to the content of Trimalchio's speech, particularly the "seriousness of the topic," and concludes that "Petronius carefully modulates the language of Trimalchio, always taking into account the dramatic context, the content of his speech, and his psychological state of mind" (Boyce, 1991: 102). But this "careful modulation" is arguably then a blunder on Petronius' part, or at least a departure from what he has supposedly been doing with Trimalchio and his language up to this point in the *Cena*. Until this scene Petronius has gone to great lengths to create character through speech. Here, he decides to break characterization because of "the seriousness of the topic" at hand? This is an assumption based upon the assumption that we are to take Trimalchio at face value throughout the rest of the *Cena*: Trimalchio is a nouveau riche fool of low origins, vulgar, with aspirations of class-climbing reflected in part through his incongruous vulgar and hyperurbane speech. Petronius, though, takes the topic of death seriously, so *he* sacrifices characterization of this fool in favor of correct speech appropriate to the sentiment. This seems a unique intrusion of the author into the world he has created.

A different reading of this passage, one that does not pass negative judgment on Trimalchio, but acknowledges him as *Saturnalius Rex*, is that Trimalchio, not Petronius, is breaking character here. Trimalchio, not Petronius, finds the topic of his death and legacy a serious matter, and therefore stops, just for a moment, playing the fool. His language levels out, neither vulgar nor hypercorrect, more classically "normal," because it is his natural way of speaking, and the combination of the vulgar and the hyperurbane--his *iuncturae acres*--has been his characterization of a fool as the host of the Saturnalian feast. This is supported by

the fact that Petronius is still clearly making choices to create characterization with language. Trimalchio still talks like Trimalchio, just a more mainstream version. At 71.1, for instance, *fatus* and *lactem* are both masculine rather than neuter, a common shift in freedman language according to Boyce (1991: 46). There is also the very nice grotesque touch that Trimalchio's sole use of a supine, of that more sophisticated grammar, is *cacatum*: he wants his monument under guard so people don't run in to crap. The voice here is still certainly Trimalchio's, but we are listening to him in a different context, hearing a different register. Once this serious discussion is over, Trimalchio returns to a more vulgar speech as he sums up his accomplishments. This is a particularly nice way for Petronius to close out his characterization of Trimalchio because the return of the fool's mask as Trimalchio sums up his own life is then to be read as part of his extended joke. Here, he is not to be taken seriously, doesn't take himself seriously, and his friends are all in on the joke. Rather than read Trimalchio as the butt of Petronius' satire, we see him as self-deprecating through the use of the grotesque persona.

Trimalchio and the Material Bodily Lower Stratum

Another amusing manifestation of Trimalchio's uneasy joining of the vulgar with the hypercorrect occurs at 47, in which he returns to the table after a bathroom break. Boyce (1991: 101) finds Trimalchio "indelicate only in the content of his speech: his language is painfully euphemistic." Trimalchio recounts his gastro-intestinal difficulties, a scatological subject, but without resorting to the scatological language found in other places in the *Satyricon*. For his constipation, at 47.2 for

instance, he says, "venter mihi non respondit" (my bowels are unresponsive) and, after some helpful medical advice on the condition, goes on to say, "Spero tamen, iam veterem pudorem sibi imponet" (well, I do hope now it will observe an old-fashioned sense of decency). His stomach needs to be more polite! Trimalchio, ever the gracious host, grants his guests special dispensation in this area:

> Itaque si quis vestrum voluerit sua re causa facere, non est quod illum pudeatur. Nemo nostrum solide natus est. Ego nullum puto tam magnum tormentum esse quam continere. Hoc solum vetare ne Iovis potest. Rides, Fortunata, quae soles me nocte desomnem facere? Nec tamen in triclinio ullum vetuo facere quod se iuvet ... (47.4)
>
> Therefore if any of you should need to "approach the bench," it's nothing to feel embarrassed about. Not one of us was born solid. I think there is no torture so great as holding it in. This is the one thing even Jove himself cannot do. Oh, you're laughing, Fortunata, when you're the one who keeps me up all night? As a matter of fact, I won't stop anyone from doing whatever he wants in the dining room ...

Here, the vulgarity lies in the subject matter, a grotesque juxtaposition of meal and bodily functions, taken to the extreme by Trimalchio's permission to combine them both in the same room if anyone wants. But, unlike the Claudius of Seneca (or, for that matter, of Suetonius![246]), Petronius' Trimalchio is rather dainty with his language and what he actually does (he is returning to the room after his "business," rather than following his own advice at 47.4). Schmeling (2011: 197) notes that in this passage Trimalchio's symptoms are reminiscent of *Parilicii*, a mime of

[246] *Life of Claudius* 32: "dicitur etiam meditatus edictum, quo veniam daret flatum crepitumque ventris in convivio emittendi ..." (it is said that he even considered an edict in which he granted a pardon for letting loose a fart--silent or loud--at a dinner party).

Laberius.[247] The presence of such humor in a mime is indicative of popular tastes when it comes to scatology. In fact, as "vulgar" as Trimalchio supposedly is throughout the *Cena*, he rarely lapses into scatological language, preferring to employ euphemisms instead. The joke of course is the contradiction in "polite" language and crude subject matter/behavior. Trimalchio is performing his role as fool here, juxtaposing polite euphemism, pseudo-medical knowledge, good hosting, and philosophy with as low a subject as he can find.

When Trimalchio says at 47.6, "Credite mihi, anathymiasis in cerebrum it, et in toto corpore fluctum facit" (trust me, this essence gets into the brain and then floods the whole body), his grotesque humor works on many levels at once. *Anathymiasis* is used medically and philosophically "for the life force of the soul" (Schmeling, 2011: 200[248]), but Trimalchio centers that "life force" deep in the bowels before bubbling it up to the head; from there, it causes more trouble for the body in the form of a downward-flowing flood. The life force of the soul is just intestinal gas, enjoying its own ridiculous, grotesque cycle. This is reminiscent of the joke in the *Apocolocyntosis* conflating Claudius' soul with a fart. Bakhtin (1968: 146) on this grotesque blending of feast and feces says that "defecation played a considerable role in the ritual of the 'feast of fools.'" Trimalchio's humor here, then, is part and parcel of the grotesque and the Saturnalia, a prototype of this feast. His

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[247] Bonaria, *I Mimi Romani*, 83: "foriolus esse videre: in coloeos cacas" (I think I have diarrhea: I shat my balls.) While there is some common ground, I'm not sure that Schmeling's connection here isn't a stretch. Nevertheless, even without a direct connection, the subject matter is shared between the mime and this passage in Petronius.

[248] Schmeling cites Galen *de Usu Partium* 11.14 and Theodorus Priscianus *Euporista* 2.42-43.

humor would be understood in that context and appreciated by those sympathetic with non-elite culture. Trimalchio is not the only one to enjoy a scatological joke at the expense of philosophy or to combine the dining room and the latrine into a one-stop convenience. A fruitful comparison of this scene can be made with the decorative program of the Caupona of the Seven Sages in Ostia (Figures 19-21). Though only partially preserved, the entire program of the room can be reconstructed in its broad strokes, and the specifics are very illuminating. Three of the Seven Sages remain. Each Sage is elevated on a pedestal and painted as if a statue. On either side of the statue, in Greek, are the Sage's name and city. Underneath each Sage, written in Latin, is a single verse. Under Solon of Athens: "ut bene cacaret, ventrem palpavit Solon" (To crap well, Solon massaged his belly); under Thales of Miletus: "durum cacantes monuit ut nitant Thales" (Thales advised those crapping a hard one to lean into it); and under Chilon of Lacedaemon: "vissire tacite Chilon docuit subdolus" (tricky Chilon taught how to fart in silence). The other four Sages no doubt had more to teach on the subject of shitting and farting.

These paintings, situated in a *caupona*, are useful in presenting to us a popular, vulgar sense of humor, the kind of humor that Petronius is appropriating and using for his own literary purposes in the *Cena*. First, there is an awareness and familiarity with "elite" culture. The sages are set up as statues and their names and points of origin written in Greek. There is also a mockery of that elite culture in juxtaposing the images with the Latin verses about shitting underneath. But the simple juxtaposition of philosophers with shitting is not the only level of the joke. The "teachings" of the sages are written in verse, giving them a mock-elite cultural

note, and the placement of the shit-teachings underneath the seated statues gives us an idea of what the common man might have thought about philosophy. It's illuminating in this context because of the combination of familiarity with elite culture but a simultaneous delight in bringing it low. Trimalchio's use of the word *anathymiasis* clues us in that he is making a similar kind of joke.

The comparison, though, doesn't stop there. Under the Seven Sages, in a ring around the caupona, are painted seated figures of men shitting, each with his own tagline such as *mulione sedes* (you are sitting on a mule driver); or *bene caca et irrima medicos* (shit good and fuck the doctors). The seated men ring the room on the two walls right and left of the entrance as well as the back wall. Essentially, the image is that of a public latrine. The juxtaposition of these images with food and drink is obviously intended to be funny, and it is along these lines, I think, that Trimalchio suggests to his guests that they feel free to do their business right there in the triclinium, though he himself excused himself from the room for such purposes and also tells them that his facilities stand at the ready. Despite his understanding of these paintings and of the humor of non-elite culture, Clarke (2003: 177) doesn't see the same type of humor at work in Trimalchio:

> He dirties the banquet with inappropriate references to elimination. He is also addled, whether by wine or by nature, so that his musings about constipation free-associate moronically, leading him from his bowels' misbehaving to Jupiter's lack of control to thoughts of death. In every way Petronius has Trimalchio overturning the rules for proper banquet conversation and behavior--all for the amusement of the cultured elite reader.

Clarke refuses to admit the humor as popular, as Trimalchio's, because the source is Petronius, whom he pointedly labels "arbiter of elegance." Popular, even vulgar culture, though, can be appropriated and understood by the elite without the reflection being negative. When elite culture is tired, used up, when it is inextricably connected with the past, where would a rebellious, forward-looking emperor--and his *arbiter elegantiae*--turn but to popular culture for something fresh? The humor is in the pretense, the conflict between low and high culture, but it need not be at Trimalchio's expense. Popular culture only comes off as the presumed target of Petronius' wit because of assumptions that are carried into the reading of the *Cena*.

Typically, we are told to take Trimalchio at face value here in terms of his crudity and interpret his language as the pretentious and confused rambling of a fool. It's actually a crude and smart plunge into the humor of the material bodily lower stratum, the zone where eating, digesting, and defecating all take place. It's then spiced with a bit of extra delicate language, philosophy, and religion to enhance the silliness of what he is saying. It's all just a joke, part of the role of the crude fool Trimalchio is playing as a *Saturnalius Rex* and the grotesque, popular humor Petronius has adopted. The target, though, is elite culture itself, not Trimalchio's "pathetic"[249] attempts to live it.

Freedmen: Saturnalian, Hybrid, and Grotesque

We are told by Encolpius that Trimalchio is the "tyrant" of the feast (41.9), and it is worth noting that we are frequently "seeing" the *Cena* and Trimalchio through Encolpius' eyes. So the question is, who is the butt of Petronius' joke? Is he

[249] Boyce (1991: 96).

making fun of the freedmen and their overblown king, or is he suggesting that the kind of flaccid elitism espoused by Encolpius is really the problem? If we look at the character sketches of a few of Trimalchio's freedman guests, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that they, at least some of them—there is plenty of individuality amongst this crew—are the more admirable and the more vital figures.

Habinnas, for example, is arguably the most likable man at the feast. It has been noted that Habinnas' entrance at Trimalchio's feast is reminiscent of Alcibiades' arrival at Socrates' symposium in Plato.[250] This is generally taken as a sign that an (unfavorable) comparison is to be made: in place of Socrates' "sober" symposium we have Trimalchio's drunken, ill-informed feast:

> Where Alcibiades had leaned on a flute-girl, Habinnas is supported by his formidable and vulgar wife, Scintilla; Alcibiades was garlanded with ivy and violets, whereas Habinnas' head is dripping with unsavoury oils; Alcibiades' first words were to apologize for his drunken state, Habinnas' to shout for more wine (a motif which comes only later in the Alcibiades scene-213 e); Alcibiades gracefully asked whether he might come in, whereas Habinnas walks straight to the best seat. Where Alcibiades was modest, Habinnas is overbearing. And Trimalchio of course sees nothing wrong. Cameron (1969: 368)

But why do we need to make the comparison so unfavorable? Petronius at 65.7 describes Habinnas as "unguento per frontem in oculos fluente" (with oil flowing down his forehead into his eyes); there is no statement that the oil is "unsavoury," as Cameron adds. Alcibiades' arrival in Plato has already been discussed, and it is not quite the courteous affair Cameron describes either: Plato describes him as

[250] Lehmann (1900: 925-926), Cameron (1969: 367-368), Walsh (1970: 40 n. 1), Boyce (1991: 88), e.g. Contesting the direct link are M. Smith (1975: 181), and Sullivan (1968a: 92, 125)

"σφόδρα μεθύοντος καὶ μέγα βοῶντος" (really drunk and bellowing loud). What Cameron plays out is the typical preference for the classical over the festive: in this case, the festive nature of Plato is rewritten as sober and polite and details of boorishness and tastelessness are added to Petronius' supposed satire on these freedmen. Instead of insisting on a one-for-one equation of the two works, what if we are simply to see in Habinnas an echo of Alcibiades, a charismatic and likable figure? A negative comparison of Habinnas with Alcibiades misses the Saturnalian context, the humor and the humanity of the piece, rejecting it in favor of an elitist reading of Petronius, the aristocrat, satirizing this group of freedmen (what, by the way, would really be the point?).

Habinnas' entry, in fact, takes the party up a notch, as even Cameron (1969: 368), acknowledges and Boyce (1991: 89) affirms: "he is fun, physical, in every way a bon vivant." Unlike many of the more serious freedmen at the party, Habinnas' entrance is a late show-stopper and a performance geared towards laughter. He is Trimalchio's second act.[251] His humor, it is worth noting, is often self-directed,[252] and Flores (1973: 95), finds him extremely intelligent and capable of self-deprecating irony.[253] He paints a picture of himself as a bit of a glutton, a bit greedy, a bit henpecked, a bit thrifty, and a bit sacrilegious. This is Saturnalian humor—self-inclusive rather than judgmental (such as that of Giton, Encolpius, and Ascyltos).

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[251] Conte (1996) describes Habinnas' entrance and speech as a "miniature narration" of the *Cena*.
[252] Boyce (1991:88).
[253] Flores makes these remarks in the context of interpreting Habinnas' remark about Massa at 68.8: "duo tamen vitia habet, quae si non haberet, esset omnium numerum: recutitus est et stertit" (he has two flaws; if he didn't have them, he'd be really well thought of: he's circumcised and he snores).

But when, for instance, Habinnas has his exchange with his wife about her earrings, it is clear that it's all in fun and the joke, at his expense, is one he gets as well as he tells:

> "Quid?" inquit Habinnas, "excatarissasti me, ut tibi emerem fabam vitream. Plane si filiam haberem, auriculas illi praeciderem. Mulieres si non essent, omnia pro luto haberemus; nunc hoc est caldum meiere et frigidum potare." (67.10)
>
> "What?!" said Habinnas, "You cleaned me out to buy you a glass bead. Truthfully, if I had a daughter, I'd cut off her ears. If it weren't for women, they'd all be worth dirt; as it is now, it's piss warm and drink cold."

Assuming the role of a put-upon husband who can't fathom (or afford) his wife, Habinnas plays at being broke and powerless, though he is neither.

The grotesque nature of his various appetites is likewise to be understood in the Saturnalian context as positive and humorous. Habinnas arrives drunk at 65.7, so much so that he's leaning on his wife. He immediately calls for wine:

> Praetorio loco se posuit continuoque vinum et caldam poposcit. Delectatus hac Trimalchio hilaritate et ipse capaciorem poposcit scyphum quaesivitque, quomodo acceptus esset. "Omnia" inquit "habuimus praeter te."
>
> He took the seat at the head of the table and straightaway called for wine and hot water. Trimalchio, delighted by this festive spirit, called for a bigger cup too and asked how he had been received. "We had it all," he said, "except you."

Are we really meant to contrast this figure unfavorably with Alcibiades, whose arrival we are reminded of in the *Symposium*? Or, does the reminder serve to imbue Habinnas with some of that charismatic character's glamor? Contrary to Cameron's negative assessment, Habinnas' arrival is not boorish, just festive. His host is

delighted by his *hilaritas*, and Habinnas is gracious in turn: the only thing missing from the other feast was Trimalchio. The comments are warm and friendly. By contrast, Encolpius is the only one not happy to see Habinnas when he arrives. Seeing Habinnas' *sevir* robes and trappings, he mistakes him for an official:

> Ego maiestate conterritus praetorem putabam venisse. Itaque temptavi assurgere et nudos pedes in terram deferre. Risit hanc trepidationem Agamemnon et "Contine te," inquit, "homo stultissime. Habinnas sevir est idemque lapidarius, qui videtur monumenta optime facere." (65.4-5)
>
> Frightened by his official looks I thought a commissioner had come. And so I tried to get up and get my bare feet on the floor. Agamemnon laughed at this panic, "Get it together, dummy," he said, "Habinnas is a freedman priest and doubles as a mason--he's considered an excellent maker of tombs and headstones."

This is one of the many occasions where Petronius reminds us not to take Encolpius' interpretation of things too seriously. His panic at the arrival of an official reminds us of his criminal status, and this is only one of many times where Encolpius fails to "get it." He is an unreliable interpreter of this feast, therefore, both because his class pretensions are cancelled by his fear of the law and because he is *stultissimus*, repeatedly misinterpreting or failing to interpret various appearances and riddles at the feast.

Habinnas' arrival is very much in keeping with the Saturnalian spirit of this feast. He's been partying already, with no signs of stopping. After the matter of drink is taken care of, Habinnas moves on to an extensive list of the dishes at his first dinner party--his appetite for food matches his thirst--culminating in a hearty portion (*plus libram* at 66.5) of bear meat. Conte (1996: 120-121) notes that "in the

high tradition of sympotic literature food was left offstage ... here the exact opposite happens." Essentially, Petronius is taking the high tradition of sympotic literature (elite, traditional, classical) and rendering it grotesque through the basic bodily function of food consumption at a festive, superabundant level.

The trinity of appetites is rounded out by the joking commentary on Habinnas' sex drive and his admitted attraction to one of his slaves:

> Risit Trimalchio et “Adcognosco,” inquit, “Cappadocem: nihil sibi defraudat, et mehercules laudo illum; hoc enim nemo parentat. Tu autem, Scintilla, noli zelotypa esse. Crede mihi, et vos novimus." (69.2)
>
> Trimalchio laughed and said, "I can see he's a Cappadocian: he denies himself nothing, and sweet Hercules I salute him! You only live once. But don't be jealous, Scintilla. Trust me, we know you too."

Schmeling (2011: 284) notes that Cappadocians are known for their "sexual prowess" and further points out that the pimp in Plautus' *Curculio* is described as *cappadox* at line 233. All of this, it should be noted, is said in laughter, and Trimalchio's hyperbole here, I would suggest, is meant to suggest that this is all in fun. Habinnas is at this point indulging in every appetite--drink, food, and sex; Trimalchio's assessment of Habinnas' slave, *nihil sibi defraudat*, might just as well be used of Habinnas himself. Habinnas is the life of the party.

His language has been noted by Suess (1926: 74) and Boyce (1991: 90) as an interesting juxtaposition of "ludicrous delicacy" and "scatological expressions of varying coarseness." Boyce sees in Habinnas' modes of address language

"reminiscent of the elegiac poets,"[254] while his language is replete with grotesque expressions of and about piss, crap, and other bodily functions.[255] Thus we have another freedman, who, like Trimalchio, is putting on a show, playing at times at *politesse* and then flipping it on its backside (as he literally does with Fortunata at 67.2!). The joke is clearly there, but whose joke is it really? Courtney (2001: 111) doesn't see the fun in all of this: "the crassness of this vulgar horseplay, which shows the emptiness of Habinnas' 'courtesy' at 67.1-3, does not need to be underlined." From an elite point of view, Petronius is making a joke for us at Trimalchio and company's expense: they are pompous and have pretentions of culture and sophistication that they can't really support as their coarseness breaks through and creates disjointed, awkward contrasts. Encolpius and his friends are our eyes and ears on the ground. Does that reading feel right? In keeping with the spirit of this satire?

Conversely, if we take into account the Saturnalian nature of the feast, we might come to a different conclusion. Trimalchio and company are actually having their jokes at their own expense, *but* they get the joke. They know what and who they are and are enjoying playing at aristocratic pretension. Their hybrid language, at times coarse and at times pseudo-sophisticated, is the language of performance at

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[254] "Domina mea" of Scintilla at 66.5 and "oculi mei" at 65.9 of Trimalchio and his other friends at the party. While *domina mea* may be a stretch as elegiac (see Schmeling, 2011: 275 and again at 278 for its increasingly common use as a form of address between husbands and wives) *oculi mei* does seem poetic.

[255] 66.2: *cum mea re causa facio* (when I "approach the bench"), also used by T. and discussed above); 66.5: *paene intestina sua vomuit* (she pretty much puked her guts out); 66.7: *catillum concacatum* (shit on a shingle); 67.3: *me apoculo* (I'm getting my ass out of here); 67.10: "nunc hoc est caldum meiere et frigidum potare" (translated above).

the feast, put on most especially by the two principal entertainers, Habinnas and Trimalchio. Lest we as readers forget the festive context, Petronius once again invokes the spirit of Saturnalia at 69.9. Upon the arrival of another dish, Trimalchio hints that once again things are not what they seem. Encolpius finally feels like he's got the hang of it:

> Ego scilicet homo prudentissimus, statim intellexi quid esset, et respiciens Agamemnonem, "Mirabor" inquam "nisi omnia ista de <fimo>[256] facta sunt aut certe de luto. Vidi Romae Saturnalibus eiusmodi cenarum imaginem fieri."
>
> I, naturally being a man way ahead of everyone, immediately understood what it was, and looking at Agamemnon I said, "I'll be amazed if the whole thing isn't made of shit or probably clay. I saw a fake dinner like this made at a Saturnalia in Rome."

Of course, as it turns out, Encolpius is wrong (again): it's more food for the feast! Leading up to this we have been treated to more of Encolpius' snobbery and ingratitude. He complains of Habinnas' clowning at 69.6: "Nec ullus tot malorum finis fuisset" (there would have been no end to all these troubles) and complains about the food he's received: "et haec quidem tolerabilia erant, si non fericulum longe monstrosius effecisset, ut vel fame perire mallemus" (in fact even these things were bearable, if a way more monstrous dish hadn't made us prefer death by starvation instead). Encolpius in this last comment betrays a spirit directly in

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[256] Ernout's Budé edition preseves the conjectured lacuna leaves *fimo* out, as does Smith (1975). Schmeling (2011: 286) prefers to leave it out as well, saying, "the conjectured lacuna after *de* should thus be filled not by Bücheler's *cera*, though Müller adopts it, but by a word for some substance worse than *lutum,*" though he apparently finds *fimo* unacceptable without commenting on it. Bücheler's edition of 1904 has *fimo*, as does Maiuri (1945). Marmorale (1961) has *farto*, Heseltine (1987) adopts Bücheler's (later) suggestion of *cera*.

opposition to the entire purpose of feasting, a celebratory defiance against hunger and death. Far from being *prudentissimus*, he's completely missed the point, as he has consistently throughout the feast. Ultimately, the real satire, the real joke, is on Encolpius and his friends (and maybe us too) who fail to understand these people in the context of this Saturnalian feast.

That this is the true focus of the satire and that the tone is actually meant to be read as funny and convivial is indicated as well in the confrontation between Hermeros and Ascyltos and Giton discussed above. Next to Trimalchio, Hermeros is the freedman who speaks the most in the *Cena*.[257] He is established early on, as we have seen, as something of a guide to the festivities as he glosses some of Trimalchio's Saturnalian humor (*Carpe* at 36.7 and the *aper pileatus* at 41.4) and also provides the antagonist with the backstory of Trimalchio**,** Fortunata, and a few guests starting at 37. As such, Petronius places Hermeros firmly in the know in Trimalchio's world. He is consistently positive in his reception of Trimalchio's Saturnalian performance and of his host in general. In his confrontation with Ascyltos at 57-58, then, the question to ask is "Whose side are we/should we be on?"

An interesting facet of Hermeros' language, in addition to those discussed above, is his use of Greek.[258] Boyce (1991:92) suggests a "special attempt by Petronius to represent the heavy Greek influence on the speech of Hermeros." Greek is an important issue in the literature of the Romans and in Roman satire.

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[257] Dell'Era (1970: 41).
[258] See Suess (1926: 59-60) and Salonius (1927: 22-24).

Horace and Persius[259] both at points in their satires express negative thoughts about mingling Greek into Latin literature or choosing Greek over Latin, but this is consistently aimed at "high" culture and at the mutated, exaggerated styles derived from Hellenistic poetry.

Petronius on the other hand, in his heavily Greek Hermeros, seems to be claiming an entirely different stratum of the language for his grotesque, Saturnalian piece of literature. The Greek birds of Persius are represented, to some extent, in Petronius by the *scholastici,* Agamemnon and Encolpius. They are the literary products of post-Augustan culture, or at least pretenders to that status, and Hermeros, in his critique of them, uses Greek in a different, enlivened way. In the *Cena*, Petronius' is the language of the freedmen, colorful, crude, and hybrid, a Greek becoming Latin becoming Greek. It is his version of revitalizing the language of literature through a grotesquing of language itself. It is important to note that Hermeros' speech is not simply "low," but is in fact a more expressive and surprising hybrid of "correct" and vulgar speech, a sort of milder version of Trimalchio's extremes. Bodel (1984: 144-145) sees in Hermeros a portrait "drawn without exaggeration or distortion," contrasting him with Trimalchio's extremes. While I do not agree with the reasons Bodel suggests for the contrast (noted above), I do think that Hermeros is meant to represent a more realistic portrayal of a freedman, as opposed to Trimalchio's self-consciously foolish *Saturnalius Rex*.

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[259] e.g. Horace *Sermones* 1.10.16-26, where he critizes blending the two languages. Later in the same poem, he also says he's against writing wholely in Greek. In Satire 1, Persius seems to be reacting to subject matter rather than language for the most part. In Satire 5, he also rejects the subject matter and style of Greek tragedy, contrasting it with the *verba togae* (line 14).

Hermeros in both his realistically portrayed social status and in his language represents the hybrid spirit of the freedman that is part and parcel to the spirit of Saturnalia and to the grotesque. At all times, Petronius controls Hermeros' language and deploys his wide-ranging lexicon and syntax according to context, playing up one side or the other of this slave-becoming-citizen.[260] In Hermeros' angry exchange with Ascyltos, where he contrasts himself with the *scholastici,* Petronius makes a point of mirroring Hermeros' statements of difference with language. There are a large number of vulgarities, syntactical errors, proverbial expressions, and Greek peppered in:

> Recte, videbo te in publicum, mus, immo terrae tuber: nec sursum nec deorsum non cresco, nisi dominum tuum in rutae folium non conieci, nec tibi parsero, licet mehercules Iovem Olympium clames. Curabo, longe tibi sit comula ista besalis et dominus dupunduarius. Recte, venies sub dentem: aut ego non me novi, aut non deridebis, licet barbam auream habeas. Athana tibi irata sit, curabo, et qui te primus deurode fecit. Non didici geometrias critica et alogias, menias,[261] sed lapidarias litteras scio, partes centum dico ad aes, ad pondus, ad nummum. (58.4-7)

> Alright--I'll see you on the street, rat--no!--fungus: I'm not growing up or down till I make mincemeat out of your master.[262] And I'm not letting you off--sweet Hercules!--not if you call on Olympian Jove. I'll take care of you--that dime-store hair of yours and your two-

[260] For the impression of social mobility in the *Cena*, see Courtney (2001: 87).
[261] Ernout's Budé edition (1990) adopts Scheffer's *alogas naenias* (trivial nonsense), as does Maiuri (1945). Bücheler (1904), Marmorale (1961), Smith (1975), Heseltine (1987), and Schmeling preserve *alogias menias*. I prefer the specificity of *alogias menias,* and the meaning seems to jibe very well in this context of high v. low culture better than the more generic emendation.
[262] In Martial 11.31 the phrase in rutae folium is used in the context of food preparation; likely the leaf of rue is a wrap for some kind of sweetmeat (Shackleton Bailey, 1993: 30). I therefore went for a culinary expression in my translation that would convey a threat.

> bit master won't help. Alright--wait'll I get my teeth into you: you may look like heaven, but you won't be laughing or my name isn't Hermeros. Athana curse you--I'll take care of you, and the one who made you his butt-ler.[263] I didn't learn geometries, criticisms and illogics, *Wraths* ..., but I know how to print, I do the numbers for cash, weight, and currency.

Recte, used twice in this excerpt, is a colloquial introduction to a threat.[264] Trimalchio uses it along with *curabo*, also appearing twice in this passage, at 74.17, confirming that this particular mode of speech is typical of Petronius' freedmen. There are multiple colloquial terms of abuse, such as *mus* and *tuber*, both indicating Ascyltos' shady character and preference for a safe hiding spot; according to Schmeling (2011: 241) they both "are understood to be things found underground,"[265] hence my substitutions of "rat" and "fungus."[266] He expresses his low estimation of Giton and Ascyltos' value with *dupunduarius* and *besialis* (Hofmann, 1978: 129). Grammatically and syntactically, hypercorrection is lacking from this speech,[267] and Schmeling (2011: 242) comments that "the freedman employs graphic usages of tenses, present and perfect, in place of the expected

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[263] *Deurode* is actually Greek for "come here." It's something that could be addressed to a slave neutrally, just as a servant, though there may be a sexual suggestion as well; see Smith (1975: 161) and Schmeling (2011: 242).
[264] Schmeling (2011: 241); Hofmann (1978[4]: 46).
[265] Opelt (1965: 43) glosses *mus* as proverbial with words for wall, indicating helplessness as well: "quasi mus in pariete, wie die Maus in der Wand, d.h. ganz hilflos, wird er die Zärtlichkeiten der Casina mit ihm ansehen müssen ... die Maus befindet sich in beiden Fällen in auswegloser Lage." It is possible that a similar image is being deployed here: the mouse stays out of sight out of fear and powerlessness, but Hermeros will get him out into the light.
[266] Opelt (1965: 88) glosses *terrae tub*er as "Pilz" ("mushroom").
[267] Boyce (1991: 93).

future and future perfect." Greek also surfaces,[268] both in the insulting substantive *deurode* (δεῦρο δή) and, emphasizing Hermeros' hybridity in language and culture, *Athana*, Doric dialect[269] for the Greek goddess, though Hermeros has used a Latin name, *Iovem*, for a deity three sentences earlier.

This excerpt can be read as reflecting a certain degree of agitation. Hermeros has lost his cool and control of his language, but, as Boyce (1991: 93) points out, "the high degree of popular coloration ... is also artistically appropriate to the content of the speech, which serves specifically to characterize Hermeros as a freedman and to illustrate his attitude toward the other social classes." In that reading, then, Hermeros is more in control of his language, and is actually code switching to draw a distinction between himself and Ascyltos and Giton, whose snobbery and pretensions have kindled this outburst. This rings true when considered with Hermeros' contrast of their respective educations: Hermeros has been educated practically, and the supposed *scholasticus* has not.[270] Here we see the different registers of Greek coming into play: the subjects that Hermeros claims he didn't study, in all their ungrammatically pluralized glory, are all Greek words. They're just not *Hermeros'* Greek.

It is tempting to see in this scene the kind of situation that Persius is describing at lines 121-131 of Satire 1. There, Persius has planted his critical secret

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[268] For a complete listing of Hermeros' Greek words and expressions, see Boyce (1991: 92-93) and Adams (2003: 21 n. 65).
[269] Adams (2003: 149).
[270] It is worth noting that the text here is corrupt, and that many emendations have been proposed. *Menias* in particular has attracted scholarly creativity, but the reading in H is appealing as a reference to Homer's first word (μῆνιν), and therefore "title," of the *Iliad*.

in his book, which he says he would trade for *nulla Iliade*, a sort of pluralizing just as *Menias* is in Hermeros' speech. He then goes on to assert that he's not interested in the type of reader "qui in crepidas Graiorum ludere gestit," (who's itching to make fun of Greek sandals) and "qui abaco numeros et secto in pulvere metas/scit risisse" (who has the know-how to make fun of a basic math class). Here, Persius' satiric interests and targets seem quite sympathetic with the words of Hermeros, and I believe Petronius intends the reader to be as well. So we are presented with a character at about the midpoint of the *Cena*, already established as closely tied to and sympathetic with Trimalchio. It is difficult not to see him contrasted favorably with our protagonists, as he does himself. Further, the echoes of Persius' satires, those tied to Satire 1 just mentioned and the echo of Satire 4[271] in Hermeros' speech discussed earlier, invite us to read him as the eyes of the satirist, rather than the protagonists.

Maecenas Inc.

The revitalization of literary language is one of the cornerstones of the Neronian grotesque project, the ultimate fruition of the renewal implicit in the symbolism. Different authors approach this in different ways, as has been seen, but it is worth noting that this revitalization is often a direct comment on the "rules" for literature established by Augustus' poets, notably Horace, and the subsequent overdevelopment of these rules over decades of looking back to Latin Literature's

[271] "In alio peduclum vides, in te ricinum non vides" (you see the louse on somebody else, but you don't see the tick on yourself) at 57.7 echoes the sentiment of Persius' "ut nemo in sese temptat descendere, nemo,/sed praecedenti spectatur mantica tergo!" (Nobody tries to get down into himself--nobody--but oh how that backpack on the guy walking past gets looked at!) at 4.23-24.

Golden Age. Petronius, through the *Satyricon*, engages with Horace's rules for speech and for satire, turning them on their heads, defying them, or following them with tongue firmly in cheek.

Horace described his satires (he never used that particular term) as *sermones,* conversations. Drop the meter, he says, and they are just plain chitchat.[272] That his "plain speech" is anything but has been documented with certainty, and no one ever takes the statement especially seriously. So, in Petronius, in the place in the work where the speech is plainest (but not), we might expect to find some humorous, challenging engagement with Augustan culture, since the Neronian grotesque consistently puts itself in dialogue with, in competition with, the Augustan ideal. Of course, it's there (as it is at other points in *Satyricon* as well).

One interesting point of contact is in the ground shared by Maecenas and Trimalchio—poetic ground among others, of course. Byrne (2006: 105) notes that "Maecenas' recent popularity as an Augustan writer as well as his Alexandrian tendencies make him a suitable recipient of overt criticism" for Seneca. Assuming Petronius' shared targets as a member of Nero's inner circle and a participant in the grotesque program of satire, it makes sense to see Maecenas targeted in the *Cena* for parody. At 71.12 the connection is made clearest.[273] Trimalchio, discussing his tomb project, offers up his proposed epitaph:

> C. Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus hic requiescit.
> Huic seviratus absenti decretus est. Cum posset in
> omnibus decuriis Romae esse, tamen noluit. Pius, fortis,
> fidelis, ex parvo crevit, sestertium reliquit trecenties,
> nec unquam philosophum audivit. Vale. Et tu.

[272] E.g. *Sermones* 1.4.56-62
[273] Byrne (2006: 99-102) details all similarities, verbal, physical, etc.

> Caius Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus rests here. The priesthood of Augustus was conferred on him in absentia. Although he could have been on all the panels of magistrates at Rome, he refused. Dutiful, brave, trustworthy, he came from little, left 30,000,000 sesterces, and never listened to a philosopher. Farewell. (You too.)

The epitaph is unusual in many respects. Mommsen (1878: 116-121) does a complete breakdown of the epitaph, including a reconstruction of what the inscription would actually look like, and notes the unusual characteristics. But it is worth keeping in mind that this is Trimalchio talking at a dinner party, not actually describing a real epitaph. The tomb doesn't yet exist, and there is ample justification at this point in the *Cena* for taking anything Trimalchio says as humorous and performative. The agnomen *Maecenatianus* attracts attention from the go. Schmeling (2011: 301) points out that it is not used when Trimalchio's full name and rank are given at 30.2, and it is unlikely that Trimalchio was owned by or connected to Maecenas,[274] since his name implies a Caius Pompeius owned him. D'Arms (1981) connects the dots of Trimalchio's epitaph in an interesting way, noting *Maecenatianus* and *absenti* are both unusual, if not impossible.[275] D'Arms (1981: 112) suggests that "both words are perfectly suited to the personality whom the third sentence introduces: a man of dignity, like the rich Roman equestrians, conspicuously suited for honors, casually indifferent to those which are bestowed,

[274] Priuli (1975: 43-46) discusses the possibility, however remote, along with all other possible interpretations of the name. Priuli's opinion is that Petronius, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, uses the second cognomen to indicate a desire "dimenticare le sue servili origini" (46).
[275] See Priuli (1975) for the impossibility of a connection with Maecenas; Mommsen (1878: 118-119) and D'Arms (1981: 112) note the incongruity of *absenti* with the sevirate.

and disinclined to actively seek those which he could effortlessly obtain." So here Trimalchio is emphasizing his career arc as similar to that of Maecenas, who also might have held high honors but passed them over in favor of a life of *honestum otium*.[276] D'Arms (1981: 113) ultimately sees this as a joke by Petronius at Trimalchio's expense: "the humor lies partly in the incongruity of the notion of a freedman's adoption of an attitude appropriate only to persons of greatly superior social status; but especially in his thinking the expression of that attitude appropriate (*idonea*) for his gravestone." But this is not a gravestone: it's chit-chat over a raucous, Saturnalian dinner party, and once again I would suggest that Trimalchio is playing the fool rather cleverly. The invocation of Maecenas here could also be intended as a guide to navigating who's to be trusted as the real arbiters of taste at the feast. It is common to compare the *Cena* to Horace's Satire 2.8, the feast of Nasidienus. One of the guests at that feast is Maecenas, and he and his friends are the ones whose point of view we are told by Horace to trust. Encolpius and company would seem to have been cast in the role of Maecenas and his friends, but the joke's on us if we go along. The real "Maecenas" here is Trimalchio, grotesque to be sure; Encolpius' rejection of Trimalchio Maecenatianus' Saturnalian extravaganza, then, is an inversion of the *Cena Nasidieni*, a grotesque rewriting of that scene with the snobs ultimately the butt of the joke.

There are other echoes of Maecenas. Suess (1926: 78) notes that "in plebecula demonstravit illud, quod in Maecenate vidit Seneca," specifically Seneca's description of Maecenas in *Epistles* 114.6:

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[276] D'Arms (1981: 113).

> ... hoc tibi occurret, hunc esse, qui solutis tunicis in urbe semper incesserit? Nam etiam cum absentis Caesaris partibus fungeretur, signum a discincto petebatur. Hunc esse, qui in tribunali, in rostris, in omni publico coetu sic apparuerit, ut pallio velaretur caput exclusis utrimque auribus, non aliter quam in mimo fugitivi divitis solent? Hunc esse, cui tunc maxime civilibus bellis strepentibus et sollicita urbe et armata comitatus hic fuerit in publico spadones duo, magis tamen viri quam ipse?
>
> [Doesn't] this come to your mind, that this is the man who walked around in the city with his tunic flowing free? For even when he was taking care of Caesar's affairs when absent, they asked him for the password when he was beltless. That this is the man who on the bench, on the rostrum, in every public gathering appeared this way, his head veiled with his cloak with his ears sticking out on both sides, just like the rich man's fugitive slaves do in a mime? That this is the man who, when civil wars were clashing loudly and the city was in turmoil and under arms, had accompanying him in public two eunuchs--more manly than he was himself?

Marmorale (1961: 18) echoes,[277] tying that comparison directly to the description of Trimalchio at 32.2:

> Ipse Trimalchio ad symphoniam allatus est positusque inter cervicalia minutissima expressit imprudentibus risum. Pallio enim coccineo adrasum excluserat caput circaque oneratas veste cervices laticlaviam immiserat mappam fimbriis hinc atque illinc pendentibus.
>
> Trimalchio himself was carried out to music, and, situated among really tiny pillows he drew a laugh from those not expecting the sight. For he had enclosed his shaved head with a crimson cloak and around his neck, weighed down with garments, he had put a purple-striped napkin with fringes hanging down here and there.

[277] Marmorale does not limit the comparison to Maecenas, but also includes other "personaggi storici" such as Caesar, described by Suetonius (*Life of the Deified Julius* 45).

In addition to the details of the cloak, just before, at 27.3, Trimalchio's retinue is described as having *duo spadones* (two eunuchs) as well. Smith (1975: 68-69) does not agree that Petronius is here echoing Seneca's description of Maecenas, but his argument seems driven by the need to prove that Petronius would not satirize Seneca (he asserts this twice in two sentences, in fact). Smith's argument holds less water if we read Trimalchio as portrayed as self-aware and consistently parodying elite culture. Schmeling (2011: 114) notes that the epitaph passage discussed above, in which Trimalchio claims the name Maecenatianus, "constitutes a ring composition with 32.1-2." While the reading alone at 32.2 might not be capable of drawing Seneca's passage to mind, setting it up to be recalled at a later passage with the name of Maecenas ringing in the ears certainly seems a conscious attempt at making the connection. We then have a grotesque Maecenas presiding over a mock-elite symposium. All literary pretensions left over from the Augustan era then get their due at Petronius' hands through his Saturnalian Maecenas.

This mockery of elite culture can be seen in the performances following Habinnas' arrival at 68.3-6:

> Interim puer Alexandrinus, qui caldam ministrabat, luscinias coepit imitari clamante Trimalchione subinde: “Muta.” Ecce alius ludus. Servus qui ad pedes Habinnae sedebat, iussus, credo, a domino suo proclamavit subito canora voce:
>
> “Interea medium Aeneas iam classe tenebat.”
>
> Nullus sonus unquam acidior percussit aures meas; nam praeter errantis barbariae aut adiectum aut deminutum clamorem miscebat Atellanicos versus, ut tunc primum me etiam Vergilius offenderit. Lassus tamen, cum aliquando desisset, adiecit Habinnas et "nun<quam” in>quit “didicit, sed ego ad circulatores eum mittendo erudibam."

> In the mean time an Alexandrian slave, who was tending to the hot water, began to imitate nightingales with Trimalchio repeatedly shouting "Change it up!" And then another joke. A slave who was sitting at Habinnas' feet, told to by his master, I think, burst out suddenly in a sing-song voice:
>
> "Meanwhile Aeneas with his fleet now was holding his course midway"
>
> No sound more searing ever struck my ears; for besides the alternately raised or lowered clamor of his barbaric warbling he was mixing in lines from screwball comedies, so that even Vergil for the first time at that moment annoyed me. But when he was tired and had finally stopped, Habinnas said, "He has no formal training, instead I had him educated by sending him to street performers."

The details in this passage illustrate simultaneously the freedmen's Saturnalian parody of elite culture and Petronius' participation in the program of the Neronian grotesque. With Trimalchio serving as a parodic Maecenas, it is right that there would be a recitation of Vergil at this feast. The performance makes a mockery of the classic, though, and combines high culture with the low, popular forms of Atellane farce. The poetry thus becomes a hybrid, grotesqued as it is brought low by popular forms of laughter. This idea is enhanced by the slave's education at the school of the marketplace. The *circulator,* the type of entertainer to whom Habinnas claims to have sent the slave, was, according to Corbett (1986: 56) "a traveling salesman and peddler, going the rounds of markets and fairs, gathering circles of bystanders (*circuli*) and entertaining them with his tricks and anecdotes in order to sell his goods." Horsfall (1989: 84) adds that they "can also read a book, recite an imperial edict or even *levia carmina*." Such a description calls to mind Bakhtin's (1968: 153) description of the marketplace and its connection to popular-festive

imagery and language: "the *cris de Paris* and the announcements made during fairs by quacks and vendors of drugs. These genres are not 'separated by a Chinese wall' from the literature and spectacles of folk festivals." Trimalchio and Habinnas, at this Saturnalian feast, stage a folk sendup of elite culture by degrading it through popular entertainment (Atellane verses) and by performing it in the style of a *circulator* from the marketplace.

On Petronius' level, we see in this scene a programmatic grotesqueing of what is wrong with contemporary elite culture along very similar lines to those of Persius' programmatic statements in both his prologue and his first satire. By engaging with classic Augustan poetry, Petronius takes on the ossified classicism that has resulted in poetic stagnation. Having Vergil performed in the style of a *circulator* is simultaneously a degradation of a classic and a renewal of it through grotesque laughter. That winding up a performance piece in the marketplace was considered the final degradation of a poet Booth (1980: 167-168) sees in a number of ancient works, notably Horace *Epistles* 1.20. As Horace charts his book's future fall from grace over the years to come, he concludes the decline at line 19 with "cum tibi sol tepidus pluris admoverit auris" (when the warm sun has brought you more listeners). Noting the scale of descending fortune, Booth suggests that *tepidus sol* serves to "evoke the schedule of the *circulator*," known for noontime performances after mornings of pulling double duty as private, for-profit town criers. Horace is, of course, having a laugh, and Petronius is too. His target isn't Vergil, any more than Persius' was; Petronius' target is the elite culture that clings to the old, imitating and repeating it rather than creating something new. Petronius

offers a grotesque, comic parody of the type of dinner party Persius describes in his first satire.

Before the grotesque degradation of Vergil though, Trimalchio treats his guests to another entertainment: the Alexandrian slave imitating bird calls. I believe that here we have an echo of the imagery and terminology from the end of Persius' prologue, in which he decries bird-poets imitating men and speaking Greek. The choice of an Alexandrian slave plays into this imagery well. The grotesque program is in many ways an answer to the overly-mannered poetry inspired by Alexandrianism. Returning to Martial (14.75), we now have the *luscinia*, nightingale, here imitated by the Alexandrian, completing our collection of birds as Saturnalian gifts begun by Persius with the parrot (14.73) crow (14.74), and magpie (14.76). Here again we have a laugh at the expense of the Alexandrians: their poetry is the stuff of a joke, a Saturnalian prankish gift.

Returning to Trimalchio as Maecenas, there may be still another connection between the two. Baldwin (1984: 402-403) has noted "striking" similarities in the language and subject matter of Trimalchio's own poetry recitation at 55.6 to a remaining example of Maecenas' poetry found in Isidore (*Etymology*, 19.32.6):

> lucentes mea uita, nec smaragdos
> beryllos mihi, Flacce, nec nitentes
> nec percandida margarita quaero
> nec quos Thynica lima perpoliuit
> anulos neque iaspios lapilos
>
> my dearest, neither shining emeralds,
> nor gleaming beryl for myself, Flaccus,
> do I seek; not the whitest pearls
> nor jasper stones, nor the rings
> which the Thynian file has polished

Compare the lines above to the poem Trimalchio attributes to Publilius:

> Quo margarita cara[278] tibi, bacam Indicam?
> An ut matrona ornata phaleris pelagiis
> tollat pedes indomita in strato extraneo?
> Smaragdum ad quam rem viridem, pretiosum vitrum?
> Quo Carchedonios optas ignes lapideos,
> nisi ut scintillet probitas e carbunculis?
>
> Why a precious pearl, the fruit of India, for yourself?
> So your lady, decked in mermedallions,
> can spread her legs, gone wild on a stranger's bed?
> What is the point of the green emerald, precious crystal?
> Why do you hope for the fiery stones of Carthage
> if not for Good to flash forth from the gems?

I don't find the similarities quite as "striking" as Baldwin does, given that the content is pretty generic and the language echoes, at least the obvious ones, are two names of gemstones. I would also suggest that the tone of the two passages is very different, with the "coarse and sexual"[279] *tollat pedes* setting a very different mood from Maecenas' poem to his dear friend Horace.

Of course, the poem is being recited from memory by Trimalchio, so that adds another layer, and possibly the opportunity for--intentional or not--misquoting. Trimalchio attributes the poem to Publilius. Maiuri (1945: 71) identifies Publilius as Publilius Syrus, first century BC writer of mimes. Perrochat (1962: 118) and Schmeling (2011: 224-225) follow suit. For Perrochat (and, to a lesser extent, Schmeling), the humor here lies in comparing Publilius with Cicero: "il est ridicule de vouloir comparer deux auteurs de genres aussi différent et de

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[278] Ernout's Budé (1990) edition goes with Ribbeck here, while editors are pretty evenly divided between margarita cara and margaritam caram. Either way, as Schmeling (2011: 226) points out, the sense is something like "'what is the purpose for you to seek pearls?' or 'what good is there in buying pearls?' or 'why are Indian pearls so dear in your sight?'".

[279] Schmeling (2011: 227).

renommée aussi disproportionnée que Publilius et Cicéron." Both also consider the actual lines spoken by Trimalchio to have been invented by Petronius, Schmeling noting that the meter (iambic senarii) was one "often used by Publilius, but the matter and nature of these lines do not resemble the extant lines attributed to him." Marmorale (1961: 95) is willing to entertain the possibility that these lines are legitimately by Publilius, but "Personalmente, pensiamo che si tratti di un pezzo di bravura di Petronio nello stile di Publilio." Ultimately, most commentators agree that Publilius Syrus is meant here, and that the main thrust of the humor is the incongruous and pretentious attempt to compare him with Cicero.

Smith (1975: 148) takes a slightly different approach, stating that it would be uncharacteristic of Trimalchio to be able to quote a lengthy passage of poetry; he also does not feel it certain that Petronius is parodying Publilius, noting how unlike these lines are to the extant lines (some of which he is concerned could be spurious) of Publilius we have. For Smith, these lines closely resemble Varro's *Menippeae*, and the joke is that "Petronius is parodying Varro in order to make Trimalchio appear even more ignorant in attributing these lines to Publilius ... It should be added, however, that, as well as any element of parody in them, these lines serve to show Trimalchio as a hypocrite." For Smith, the joke is Petronius', and it's primarily on Trimalchio.

Baldwin (1984: 402) feels that Smith is "along the right lines here," but proposes, as discussed above, Maecenas rather than Varro as the misquoted author. Essentially for Baldwin, Petronius again is making an unfavorable juxtaposition of his buffoon Trimalchio with the cultural elite with whom Trimalchio pretentiously,

desperately desires to equate himself. However, Maecenas is getting the benefit of the doubt here where Trimalchio's fate is preconceived. If their poetry is so similar is the poetry itself good or bad? If it's good, then Trimalchio isn't getting his due: he's either producing or quoting (really paraphrasing) good verse. The joke of wrongful attribution to make him look foolish doesn't quite pay off, because Trimalchio isn't quoting Maecenas—the poetry is similar, not verbatim. So are we to read the misquoted *and* misattributed lines of Trimalchio and recognize them as a different author better suited to comparison with Cicero? Instead, I think what we are seeing is a conscious grotesquing of the kind of elite pretenders that have enervated (in the minds of the Neronian circle) poetry, looking back, as always, to the Augustan period. Trimalchio has been playing at and parodying Maecenas, arguably, throughout his Saturnalian symposium. If these lines ring as loudly of Maecenas as Baldwin feels, the reader is helped to this conclusion if Maecenas has already been seen as a target of Trimalchio and Petronius' humor. There is much less of a leap to make, because the joke is less labored. The unfavorable context here, I think, is aimed backwards, at Maecenas (or his successors) with Trimalchio's parody/paraphrase part of the Saturnalian send up of Trimalchio's entire performance. In this reading, we have a similar debasement of an Augustan artist's poem to another (arguably *The*) Augustan poet, through identification with a lower, popular genre. The lines are altered, put into the meter of mime, and attributed to a writer of mime. The joke here is subtle enough where it may just be Petronius', directly to the reader, but Petronius could be setting up this literary parody as one by Trimalchio and company too.

It should also be noted that Trimalchio's supposedly ridiculous idea of comparing Cicero with Publilius (or Maecenas) isn't as straight up ridiculous as it sounds (and Perrochat says). In Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 5.1.2ff, Cicero is compared with Vergil in all seriousness. While the stature of the two is more equal, generic comparison is no more logical here than with Publilius. If the quality and reputation of Cicero's verse writing is the subject, then the comparison with Publilius actually makes more sense. Another indication that perhaps Maecenas is the butt of this joke is the fact that his Neronian reviews aren't so good. Baldwin (1984: 403) asserts that Maecenas "was much remembered and quoted in the1st century A.D." But, by contrast, we have the not-so-admiring description of his style (and, by extension, the man) from *Epistle* 114[280] of Seneca, arguably the "Maecenas" of Nero's group early on. Thus, a grotesque rendering of Maecenas, through the Saturnalia of Trimalchio, is exactly in keeping with the Neronian grotesque's principles and aims at literary rebirth through transformative debasement. Maecenas' poetry is the kind of elite stuff that's enervated poetry over the years. Putting it in the mouth of the Saturnalian king, turning it into a hybrid of elite poetry and mime, destroys it and renders it through laughter into something new and more vigorous. It's still ridiculous, but it's ridiculous on purpose.

And speaking of Seneca, why should he get off scot-free either? Our Saturnalian king has just as many—more—points of contact with Seneca as he does with Maecenas. Courtney (1991: 21) sees in the lines discussed above "a motive outside the characterization of Trimalchio, and suggest[s] that the motive was to

[280] See also *Epistles* 19. 9-10; 92; 120.19-20.

parody the quite frequent use of quotations from Publilius by Seneca to illustrate his moral teaching, and that the piece itself is a parody of such moral tirades." Courtney's traditional reading of Trimalchio[281] doesn't allow for the parody to be taking place intentionally within the world of the feast, so he attributes the parody to Petronius outside his characterization of Trimalchio. I believe that an ironic parody of a moral tirade in verse is part of Trimalchio's Saturnalian performance and humor, but that there is an added layer for the reader here that could be a parody of Seneca. Although Smith (1975: 68-69) vigorously denies any intent on Petronius' part to parody Seneca, Courtney makes a good case. Seneca quotes Publilius nine times--seven in his *Epistles* and twice in his *Dialogues*--according to Courtney.[282] But it is the context that, to me, is especially suggestive of Senecan parody here. The irony of a moral tirade about luxury and wealth in Trimalchio's mouth amidst the super-abundance of the *Cena* smacks of the kind of reproach Seneca felt the need to defend himself against in his *de Vita Beata* (discussed above) in which he calls upon Socrates as his mouthpiece. Then we would have both Persius and Petronius making a similar joke through a grotesque parody about Seneca. Rose (1971: 73) details nine correspondences between Seneca's *Epistles* and the *Satyricon;*[283] Sullivan (2006: 310) sees multiple uses of Senecan material throughout the *Satyricon* and, in these points of contact, deduces evidence of a sort

[281] Like Smith, Courtney for example feels that a long quotation from Publilius is beyond Trimalchio's intellectual powers.
[282] Schmeling (2011: 225) seems less sure of that number, saying "possibly nine times in his *Ep*. and twice in his *Dial*."
[283] He also (74) indicates that there are "eighty-odd parallels" throughout.

of literary feud being waged in Nero's circle of poets[284] to win the favor of the emperor. In an earlier piece, Sullivan (1963: 86) says that, "indeed, if the *Satyricon* is not a direct attack on Senecan writing, it is surely an attack on the sort of thing Seneca wrote in the Letters to Lucilius." That may be a bit strong, but the Senecan material appearing in the *Cena,* interestingly, has its own particular flavor: "the dramatic use of Senecan material to throw scorn on its philosophical implications."[285] As an example, Sullivan cites the passage of the *Cena* beginning at 70.10, in which Trimalchio invites two of his slaves to join them at the table (in Saturnalian fashion). One slave imitates a(n unknown) tragedian, then challenges Trimalchio mock-insolently to bet on the Greens in the upcoming races (Trimalchio is not a fan of the Greens). Trimalchio, after the friendly exchange, addresses the entire table:

> ... Trimalchio, "Amici," inquit, "et servi homines sunt et aeque unum lactem biberunt, etiam si illos malus fatus oppresserit. Tamen me salvo cito aquam liberam gustabunt. Ad summam, omnes illos in testamento meo manu mitto." (71.1-2)
>
> "Friends," Trimalchio said, "slaves are people too and once drank their mother's milk same as anyone, even if cruel fate has oppressed them. But as I live and breathe they will soon taste the water of freedom. In the end, I'm freeing them all in my will."

Sullivan (2006: 310) compares this scene with Seneca's *Epistle* 47, in which Seneca says that slaves are human beings too and that it is fine to dine with them, but reads in it disapproval of Seneca's genuine sentiments about slavery and a mockery of

[284] Sullivan (1978: 163-166) gives a proposed complete roster of this circle in "Ass' Ears and Attises".
[285] Sullivan (1968b/2006: 310)

them: "Trimalchio's drunken invitation to his household to join the company at table (*Sat*. 70,10), his maudlin remarks about their common humanity despite their ill fortune: all make good literary sense as straight satire on a vulgar and pretentious freedman but how much more point do they gain if we have Seneca's letter in mind? And Encolpius' disgust is here more heavily underlined and Trimalchio's bad taste more explicitly exposed than usual." I think that, as always, a reading that focuses our views on taste and etiquette through the lens of Encolpius is problematic,[286] and that Sullivan is falling back to the default position on Trimalchio that does not allow for a more positive reading. Casting aside the baggage that normally comes with Trimalchio and reading the passage as Saturnalian in spirit, the passage can be seen as much more positive over all. If there is meant to be a direct mockery of Seneca, I would suggest that, as in the passage above, the target is the philosopher's struggle with hypocrisy. Returning to Trimalchio's epitaph for a moment, the final line--"nec unquam philosophum audivit" (and he never paid attention to a philosopher)--becomes, rather than a weak-hitting, anti-intellectual boast, a pointed barb at the contrast between (Seneca's) philosophy and life. It is also just as likely that here the Senecan echoes are being used to tie the two characters together, without any specific goal other than creating a grotesque, parodic Senecan figure.

Of course, the dynamics of the literary circle and the intentions of these points of contact must remain in the realm of speculation, but I don't see any reason to take the Seneca-Trimalchio connection as openly hostile, particularly if the character of Trimalchio himself is somewhat tongue in cheek and a good deal more

[286] Ironically, Sullivan (1968: 89) points out that Encolpius "is deliberately and constantly revealed as an inadequate moral, or even aesthetic, commentator."

positive than is often believed. Rather than a full-blown feud, how about a joke in Saturnalian spirit, perhaps a little at the expense of the "old man" who considered himself the leading light of the circle, maybe even the Maecenas to Nero's Augustus; a joke which he and others of the circle would get and, just possibly, laugh at.

Sullivan (2006: 314) goes further, suggesting that, just possibly, Seneca fires back at Petronius in *Epigram* 412, attributed to him in the *Latin Anthology*, particularly noting lines 1-2: "carmina mortifero tua sunt suffusa veneno,/ at sunt carminibus pectora nigra magis" (your poems are filled with deadly poison, but your heart is more black than your poems). Sullivan reads this as a poem later in Seneca's career, after his exile, when he is in a "position to be undermined," and suggests that the poet whose heart is more *nigra* than his poems is, in fact, T. Petronius *Niger*. Thus Seneca's verse retort, which Sullivan takes maybe too literally, is part of an ongoing literary joke, shared by all the participants.

This idea gains strength when the third side of the triangle is added: Socrates (and his pupil Alcibiades). That Trimalchio's *Cena* and Habinnas' arrival are intended to recall Plato's *Symposium* has already been noted. The equation of Trimalchio with Seneca has the further impact of creating a link between Seneca and Socrates. That joke, as we have seen, gets its full run in Persius' *Satire* 4, but here it is just a subtle nod. The fact that the joke is there, that there is a Socrates/Alcibiades reference in both Neronian satires, certainly suggests that the two authors are playing with the same joke. The idea that Seneca saw himself as a sort of Socrates to Nero's Alcibiades has been suggested commonly in the context of Persius' work, but here I think it's getting a subtle wink from Petronius as well. It's

an inside joke, but I think its presence here does something to suggest and define the makeup of the Neronian circle and its dynamic. The younger members of the circle are giving "old Socrates" a hard time.

In the end, I would argue that the *Cena* is not a satire on Neronian excess, the Neronian era, or Nero. Instead, it is first and foremost a piece of Saturnalian humor, with multiple targets in on the joke. Conte (1996: 114) describes the *Satyricon* in grotesque terms without ever invoking the word:

> The parodic inversion challenges the fictitious distinction between high and low, and the hierarchy of values is shattered ... high and low are forced together, leveled, put on equal terms. The two divergent visions of the world are set in parataxis by the materializing energy of the satiric narrative ... [which] reduces the spiritual and the abstract to the same level as the physical and material, and it concentrates on the body's functions to make this happen. By describing the process of ingestion and sexual activity, it parades the active participation of the body in its material context. From this perspective, the satirical narrative reduces everything that might be heroic and noble to a common level of physical experience.

Conte goes on assert that "this leveling of mind and body redeems the material aspect of life and brings it back from the exile to which the high literary genres had relegated it" (1996: 115). Yes, but the redemption goes both ways: literature itself was in need of redeeming, and that was the principal rebirth promised by the Neronian grotesque. Petronius, like his predecessors, is using the debasement of the grotesque to redeem and make new literature itself.

Ultimately, the freedmen at the feast are representative of the Saturnalian spirit and, for Petronius, embody symbolically the aesthetics of the Neronian grotesque: they are hybrid creatures, one foot on the lowest rungs of society and art

but with a self awareness and a control of elite culture so that they can lampoon it, to their own delight. Their "leveling of mind and body" is conscious, and it produces laughter for those sharing in the joke. By contrast, the “scholars” at the feast, Petronius’ protagonists, come off as pompous, unwilling to participate in the fun and, therefore, incapable of getting the joke. The fun is at their expense because they are incapable of participating in it, unwilling to see the vividness in a folk tale about werewolves or witches, unable to laugh at a mockery of elite culture in an intentionally grotesque Homeric recitation, and unwilling to see in Trimalchio and his fellow freedmen the vitality and the cultural vigor they represent, in contrast to their own ossified and wilted pretensions. The joke’s on them, but on anyone who chooses to see Trimalchio through their eyes as well. The real elite culture is the grotesque, and we are asked to join in--everyone is invited to Trimalchio’s party, and Nero's party too. If we choose not to join in, then we must all "confront our own ticks."

Conclusion

This thesis began with a question: why so much satire during the reign of Nero? But questions have a way of multiplying, and to begin to answer the original, both "satire" and "Nero" provoke questions of their own. The more balanced answers to those questions, I have argued, are not properly foregrounded when considering Neronian era satire and how to read it. To begin with, which Nero are we talking about? In the first section of the introduction I have not attempted any sort of rehabilitation of the emperor, but have pointed out that there is a great deal

of material out there--much of it recent, but not all--that offers a more balanced view of the emperor, both as a ruler and as an artist. There is also evidence to be found that Nero was popular with many during his reign and after: his poetry was still read, his statues were set up again, one of his immediate successors styled himself after Nero, and there was a long-lasting tradition in the vein of hero worship that Nero would return. As an illustration of the two polar readings, I have looked at interpretations of the Domus Aurea as an effort by Nero to bond with the people and to upset social hierarchies versus the traditionalist view that the palace was an extravagantly selfish creation robbing the people of Rome of their prime real estate.

I then offer up instances in which the negative construction of Nero, originating (for us at least) in the works of Tacitus and Suetonius particularly, intrudes on the scholarly imagination and disrupts real critical thinking about the emperor. The rhetorical construction of Nero by the ancient historians and biographer has come under a lot of scrutiny, especially recently, so why do we default to that rhetorical construction so often when telling Nero's story or in interpreting satire written during his time? From the historians' standpoint, for instance, I have looked at Rudich's theme of dissimulation during the reign of Nero and how the portrait of Nero as megalomaniacal monster dominates Rudich's interpretation of Neronian era writers and his imaginative reconstruction of their motives. I also contrast Syme's balanced and rational reappraisal of Tacitus' construction of the emperor Tiberius with his visceral rejection of that kind of approach to Nero. From there I have pointed out how scholars on Neronian era satire tend to default to an almost *Quo Vadis*-like depiction of the emperor in their

approach to the three satirists of the age, a story, based on the ancient rhetorical constructions, in which Nero is both monster and fool, and the satirists resist his monstrosity by playing at satirizing him through thinly veiled references. Poor Nero is too self-absorbed to get the joke.

So, is there another way to look at Nero, his reign, and the satire written during it? I have proposed that we should use the lens of Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque to view Nero's public persona, his innovations in the visual arts (portraiture, painting, architecture), and ultimately the literature, satire in particular. The term "grotesque" in its current meaning has been applied to various aspects of Neronian culture. That's natural, since the term originated with the rediscovery of the paintings in Nero's Domus Aurea. But the term is generally applied to Neronian culture as a way of indicating that something is wrong with that culture; the grotesque as formulated by theorists like Kayser is dark and disturbing. I propose Bakhtin's very specific lens of the grotesque because it tells a different story, one not tailored to fit the rhetorical construct of Nero the monster.

I then identify the key aspects of Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque and, where necessary, put them in a more Roman context. Bakhtin's theory of carnival, for instance, needed to be discussed in terms of Roman festivals and Saturnalia in particular, since that holiday plays an explicit role in two of our three satirists, and other festivals, such as the Paganalia, are invoked by the third. The ambivalence in the god Saturn, the mixture of fear and festivity, is played out in the holiday of Saturnalia, which serves the grotesque, perhaps, even better than Bakhtin's own carnival. Key to understanding Neronian satire through the lens of the grotesque's

Saturnalia is its promise of rebirth in the face of death and of laughter in the face of fear, and its challenge to official culture.

Another important concept of Bakhtin's grotesque is the grotesque body. The most fundamental aspect of Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque body is its incompleteness. The grotesque body is in a state of becoming, and as such mirrors the ambivalence we saw in the Saturnalian festival as well. This incompleteness can be manifested in various ways: hybridity, irregularity in size, disembodiment, and the various bodily functions that indicate the body is penetrable and in a state of continuous change. Importantly, the incompleteness of the grotesque body presents an immediate challenge to official, traditional Julio-Claudian culture and its emphasis on the complete, eternal classical body. For the grotesque body, the center is the material bodily lower stratum: that zone of the body responsible for those bodily functions that identify the body as grotesque: defecation, urination, sex, digestion, and birth.

Through the material bodily lower stratum debasement occurs. Debasement, "the fundamental artistic principle" of the grotesque, is, like all that is grotesque in Bakhtin's sense, ambivalent. The move downward is the move towards symbolic burial and death, but also rebirth. Debasement, originally literally through elements of the material bodily lower stratum, occurs in the grotesque not just to tear down, but to transform. Debasement in grotesque imagery and language simultaneously destroys the debased but offers renewal in its place. The ambivalence is ultimately positive, and the renewal is achieved through a plunge downward that produces laughter.

All of these elements, drawn from popular imagery, festival, and language, are deployed by the artist to create a work that in some way stands in opposition to official culture. Official culture in grotesque art serves as the creator of fear and emblem of death that is to be debased and then made new. Two new questions arise: first, how is the grotesque deployed in the Neronian program; and second, if Nero is the princeps, what is "official culture," i.e. what is the specter that needs to be debased, destroyed, and renewed for Nero and his artists?

The Neronian grotesque, I have argued, is a unifying principle of art, literature, and self-representation during the reign of the emperor. It is as comprehensive a system as the classicism of the Augustan principate, with which it is intended to engage. I have suggested that Nero, in the hopes of emulating rather than imitating Augustus, turned his interests in both the arts and in popular culture towards creating a rival visual and literary program to Augustus', which had been endlessly repeated with little variation by his successors. In a sense, Nero chose a polar opposite to the Augustan aesthetic, resulting in the Neronian grotesque.

The Neronian grotesque is interested in popular-festive forms of expression, like Saturnalia, in non-classical representations of the body, and in the ambivalent dynamic of becoming; all these elements are part of Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque. This can be seen as a unifying principle in Nero's staged, festive interactions with the people of Rome, in his portraiture, and in the painting and architectural design as well as possibly the function of the Domus Aurea. The symbolism of renewal that is so much a part of the grotesque had a political significance, suggesting a renewal of the principate as well as an artistic one,

suggesting a renewal in the visual and literary arts. This renewal would come in grotesque fashion through the debasement of the old.

Having established the tenets of the Neronian grotesque and examined its manifestation in the visual arts and in Nero's self-representation, I suggest that satire was the ideal vehicle for the literary embodiment of the new aesthetic. Beginning with a look at the genre in its two forms, I set out to both review the scholarship demonstrating that satire needn't "satirize" (in our modern sense) and identify aspects of the genre that lend itself to participation in the Neronian grotesque. Essentially, both inquiries had the same goal: to suggest that satire wasn't satirizing Nero, but rather serving him and reflecting the aesthetic values of the new principate.

Verse satire owes its reputation for moralizing principally to Juvenal, who wrote after Persius. Looking at satirists before Persius and at what Persius himself as well as later grammarians say about earlier satire, the idea of moral censure for society's ills comes into question, as modern scholars of the genre have admitted more and more. If verse satire turns out not to be principally a moralizing kind of literature, Menippean satire is perhaps even less so. Two principal modern theorists (one of them Bakhtin) even rename the genre and leave out the word satire altogether. Instead, I have argued that Neronian satire should be seen as a super-abundant genre that encompasses multitudes and juxtaposes disparate ideas, genres, and images. It is a feast filled with variety, and that variety also results in hybridity. Both of these are hallmarks of the grotesque. Satire is also quite often a challenge to authority, be it intellectual, artistic, political, or moral. In its

assumption of low generic status and its challenge to authority we see the kind of carnivalesque, Saturnalian license that would make it so natural a vehicle for the Neronian grotesque.

The humor in satire also lends itself to the grotesque, contrary to much critical skepticism, including that of Bakhtin himself. Once again, that skepticism goes back to the impact Juvenal made on the genre. Humor and laughter in and of themselves are not sufficient to qualify as grotesque in Bakhtin's sense of the word. Humor can't just destroy; it must also renew. I suggest that satire's humor is actually capable of that, provided it has not assumed a moralizing perch. If satire doesn't "satirize," it is free to debase and renew as required by the grotesque.

Having established the key components of the Neronian grotesque and satire's unique potential to serve as its literary van guard, in chapter two I have examined the *Apocolocyntosis*, not just the first satire of the Neronian era but its first piece of literature. I look at that satire as prototypical of Neronian grotesque satire: its focus on and portrayal of a grotesque body (Claudius') and its scatological functions, its interest in the lower registers of language including colloquialisms and proverbs, its debasement of Julio-Claudian traditions, and its celebration of Saturnalia. All of these fit Bakhtin's ideas about the grotesque and are found later in future expressions of the Neronian grotesque in literature, the visual arts, and self-representation.

I have argued that what makes the *Apocolocyntosis* grotesque in Bakhtin's use of the word, as opposed to Kayser's concept or a loose application of the word as Braund applies it, is that it promises renewal through its debasement. The

Apocolocyntosis puts three different planes in dialogue with one another at various points: the underworld, the earth, and the heavens. The realm of the heavens is represented by Augustus. Augustus does not escape parody in the *Apocolocyntosis* (nothing does), but his real function in the satire is to close the heavens to future would-be *divi*. Symbolically, I argued that Augustus represents the ideal that Nero wishes to equal, but in a completely different way. Augustus is a god, but that realm is now closed off. The realm of the underworld is represented by Claudius, who dies soiling himself and winds up there at the end of the satire. He is the "gay monster" of the grotesque, that aspect of official culture that once inspired terror but now has been debased as an object of ridicule. His "uncrowning" and burial, resulting in laughter, is the promise of a renewed principate in the person of Nero. On earth, now under Nero, a funeral has been transformed into a festival. "Saturnalia is over--long live Saturnalia!" Nero's promise of renewal of the principate is represented on earth as a return to the *Saturnia regna* of Augustus, but in a new, vital, Saturnalian way.

These three planes are also played out in literature, and this will continue to be a major theme of Neronian era satire. The key moment is Claudius' death. As Claudius lies there, failing to die, the god Mercury offers up a quote from Vergil. The quote is an artifact of the Augustan achievement; the point is not a critique of that achievement, but rather a signal that it is closed. The quote stands in isolation, perfect but static. That quote is soon followed by a series of hexameters that imitate Vergil and which I, along with many critics, argue is parodic of what the imitators of the Augustan achievement have become. That passage, an effusive *laudatio* of Nero

and his coming Golden Age, is followed by Claudius' scatological shuffling off of his mortal coil. I argue that the *laudatio* could not be taken seriously and was not intended to be so because of its juxtaposition with Claudius' grotesque demise. This nexus of literature parallels the three worlds of Augustus, Claudius, and Nero. Augustan literature, admittedly of the highest quality, is a static artifact, a set of quotes. Its derivative imitation is enervated, overblown, played out. Through Nero's Saturnalian renewal of the age of Saturn, literature is revived; this is evident in the parody of flaccid imitation-Vergil juxtaposed with Claudius' grotesque debasement. So, the political and the literary message of the *Apocolocyntosis* are in harmony: the Augustan achievement is closed off, classical but no longer viable; the Claudian follow-up is flaccid, weak, and ready to be put out of its misery; the principate and literature are to be renewed through the Neronian grotesque, a Saturnalian reinvention of both.

In chapter three, I have argued that the grotesque literary revolution initiated by Seneca's satire was taken up by Persius. I propose that the jarring language and "ugliness" often perceived in Persius' poetry is actually misidentified; judging Persius' poetry from the point of view of the classical aesthetic leads to conclusions about his poetry's lack of beauty that critics then want to read as a negative comment on Nero, the immorality of the Neronian age, and the poor quality of Neronian literature. I argue instead that Persius is in tune with the Neronian literary program and that his emphasis is on the grotesque revival of post-Augustan literature. Persius is well known for his engagement with Horace, and I have contended that Persius' engagement is an intentional grotesqueing of Horace to

reject his imitators and their infinite refinement of his principles. Persius respects Horace and the Augustan achievement, but realizes that it is played out and must be debased to be reinvigorated.

In the Prologue we have the first of Persius' two programmatic poems (out of a total of seven!). Persius' opening salvo against tired poetry is rich in grotesque imagery. Pegasus, as metaphor for poetic inspiration, brackets the poem. As a hybrid creature, Pegasus works simultaneously as an emblem of the grotesque and as a representative of traditional poetic metaphor. In case his grotesque nature should be missed, Persius is sure to further debase the creature, rendering him a tired old workhorse, exactly the message he wants to convey about classical poetry. It's time for something new, and Persius the hybrid poet is going to follow his Gut and offer up a remedy to all those bad bird-poets (hybrids too) that are only fit for Saturnalian prank gifts.

In Satire 1, Persius is still writing about poetry. Contrary to the assertions of the majority of critics, I have taken Persius at his word that he means poetry when he says it. In fact, I argue that the traditional reading of this poem, in which all of the spleen is being vented by Persius, makes little sense. That's not a bold statement: most commentators concur that the poem, as traditionally read, is incoherent. But rather than chalk that up to a poetic deficiency of some sort, I reject the premise that Persius has to be (the one) moralizing. By making the poem a more balanced debate on style between Persius and his Foil, the poem is more coherent and funnier. Persius appears consistently as young, rebellious, and critical of overrefined, hidebound poetry, traditional stuff so smoothed over and perfected that it's lifeless.

He wants grotesque stuff that's vital, lively, and funny. His Foil is a traditionalist when it comes to poetry, and he sees Persius' new grotesque style as immoral. It's the Foil that makes the "style is the man" criticism--like so many commentators!--of poetry, but it's Persius' poetry he's criticizing, not Nero's, and it's all a joke anyway. Persius' Foil (Persius just made him up after all) renders moral judgment of Persius' poetry in vividly imagined pornographic scenes and language; ironically, Persius' poetry is at its most grotesque when the apologist for tradition speaks.

Satire 4 tends to stymie interpreters even more. Socrates is the star, and we all know Persius is a Stoic, so surely this poem is philosophy. Surely it has a moral. Add Nero into the equation and we feel our way around to a meaning that involves "knowing thyself" as the only possible response to the corruption that's all around; it's an inward turn as an antidote to the garish nightmare of the age. But that reading generally has to dance around two issues: the language of this poem is outrageous rather than inward looking, and the philosophy is commonplace.

Instead, I have argued for a funnier, grotesque reading of this supposed Socratic dialogue. The figures of Socrates and Alcibiades operate on two levels. First, the grotesque Socrates is contrasted with the classical Alcibiades. Alcibiades never stands a chance, and Socrates' increasingly foul, grotesque rant remakes Alcibiades' perfect, classical body into a grotesque hybrid of fecund vegetation and conflated body parts. On this level, the satire, located at the middle of the book, is a return to a programmatic declaration of the new grotesque aesthetic versus the old, classical one. In my reading of this "dialogue," Alcibiades, exemplar of the classical idea, never gets a word in; traditional, classical poetry literally has nothing to say.

I also argue that Socrates and Alcibiades function on a different level as parodic representations of Nero and Seneca, and that it's a joke for Nero and others in the know. Eliminating the moralizing imperative from this poem removes any objections about the political dangers of such identification, and instead makes Seneca the butt of the joke, portraying him to grotesque extremes as a cranky, lurid blowhard whose philosophical principles are muddy commonplaces that he is unable to follow himself.

In chapter 4, I move on to Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis*. Like the other Neronian era satires, this one has been read by many commentators as either a satire on Nero himself (though this has fallen out of favor with most recent commentators) or the Neronian age in its excess and lack of taste. I have argued that, instead, this satire is meant to be read as grotesque and in the spirit of Saturnalia, with the negative commentary provided by the Satyricon's heroes certainly open to question and serving as elite foil to the festive, freedman culture on display at the feast. It is the freedmen who are portrayed sympathetically throughout the *Cena*, and their consistent enjoyment and appreciation of the feast calls into question negative assessments about taste and excess.

Trimalchio, then, I argue, is not meant to be taken literally as the boor he so often gets labeled as. Instead, I have suggested a reading of Trimalchio as consciously performative, playing the role of *Saturnalius Rex* through his riddles, gifts, generous feast, mythological malapropisms, and constant parodying of elite culture. Rather than reading him as a pathetic buffoon, I have suggested that he is

very much in control of his language, of mythology, and, in fact, enough in control of elite culture to consistently debase it to the delight of his freedman guests.

Part of that debasement, on Petronius' part and perhaps still on Trimalchio's, is enacting a grotesque debasement of Augustan culture and literature, principally through Trimalchio's frequent parallels to Maecenas. Throughout the *Cena*, Petronius creates a complex web of ties between Maecenas and Trimalchio, and this is his version of the Neronian grotesque's confrontation with traditional, Augustan culture. Debasing Vergil, Horace, and Maecenas through Trimalchio and his Saturnalian performance is Petronius' renewal of imperial literature.

I argued that Petronius, like Persius, also sets his grotesque sights on Seneca, the man who kicked off the Neronian grotesque, even if he himself was not fully a participant in its Saturnalian spirit. Persius and Petronius took the project in grotesque satire much further than Seneca, and it is possible that the two writers enjoyed tweaking the old man. Persius by reputation wasn't impressed with him, and some have suggested a literary rivalry or even a feud for dominance of Nero's literary circle between Seneca and Petronius. In any case, it seems Seneca, Nero's Socrates *and* his Maecenas, gets a grotesque sendup from the two later satirists.

Seneca's satire laid the groundwork for the Neronian grotesque, an appropriation of popular language and imagery that expressed the very real feeling of festive laughter that rejected the fear and weariness of what the principate had become and imagined a renewal of the principate and the arts that represented it. It didn't last. Bakhtin's contention about the grotesque, that its meaning of renewal and laughter was lost, holds true in this manifestation of the grotesque as well.

Classicism reasserted itself, and the literature and imagery that had dared to debase it came to be seen as lurid and ugly when viewed from the dominant, classical point of view. Even so, the Neronian revolution left its mark on satire, I would argue. The "grotesque" imagery of Juvenal and all the subsequent satire dependent on him echoes wth the Neronian grotesque. But, as Miller and others have seen, the grotesque of satire after the age of Nero was a different, more sterile phenomenon. Looking back at satire from this sterile lens of the "satiric grotesque," it's easy to see how Persius, Petronius, and Seneca could be seen as "satirizing" Nero and the excesses of their age. It's appealing to read satire as subversive, and who better to subvert than (the Suetonian-Tacitean construction of) Nero? But looking at the satire from a different, non-classical perspective leads to an interesting conclusion. The poetry of these three satirists is very much in sync with the festive and aesthetic values of the Neronian court. That being the case, Neronian era satire isn't "satirizing" Neronian culture at all; it's participating in it. Satire as *satura lanx* is part of the lavish Neronian feast, a Saturnalian rebirth and renewal of poetry and principate.

Images

Figure 1. Cameo of Apotheosis of Nero, Bibliothèque Municipale de Nancy, France. Image Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nero-nancy.jpg
He does some interesting interpretation not just of little nuggets in the written record but also of material remains that indicate Nero was a good deal more popular than traditionalists give him credit for. A cameo portrait, for instance, which depicts Nero after his death, has all the iconography that typically indicates apotheosis. "Here the emperor is not just Nero the Hero; he is Divus Nero, Nero the God" (32-33).

Figure 2. From the Domus Aurea, room of Achilles of Skyros. Image source: Iacopi (1999: 68).

The room of Achilles at Skyros provides an excellent, more specific, example of the kind of painting Bakhtin is discussing: "the pilasters become plant stalks, and inside the shell-like basin there are vine tendrils full of birds, winged busts, lyres, at the side of which miniscule animals are arranged.

Figure 3. "Main" portrait type of Augustus (Augustus of Prima Porta) and copy (bronze herm from Villa dei Papiri) of Doryphorus. Source: Zanker (1998: 99).

Both Zanker (1998: 98-99) and Galinsky (1996: 165) feel that Augustus himself played a role in creating the portrait, which differed dramatically from earlier Roman portrait style. Zanker (1998: 99) describes this portrait as "a completely intellectual and artificial work of art, composed of Classical forms subtly mixed with just a few authentic physiognomic traits." The clear comparison to be made (both Zanker and Galinsky do so) is with the classical Doryphorus of Polyclitus (Figure 3). In its embrace of symmetry, "harmonious proportions" it is the "embodiment of perfection and nobility" (Zanker, 1998: 98-99). Galinsky (1996: 174) notes in particular the qualities of the hair (again modeled on the Doryphorus): "The hair of both is ordered carefully in the manner of movement and countermovement, a resolution of opposites that is at the heart of the classical aesthetic. Symmetry is suggested by the parted, forklike locks in the center of the forehead."

Figure 4. Left: Roman, first century CE, Rome, Palazzo Nuovo (Capitoline Museums) Image Source: McManus, Barbara. VROMA. web 12-08-2015. <http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/nero_head.jpg> Part of this is a 17th century restoration. Right: Roman, first century CE, Rome, Museo Palatino. Portrait type 3. Image Source: Bergmann (2013: 337).

Not only do the contours of the face and chin suggest the bulbous convexities of the grotesque body, but they also suggest the kind of feasting and abundance that is part of the overall festive mood of many incarnations of the grotesque and part of a consistent Neronian program of public appearance as well.

Nero's nose, too, is bulbous, unlike any other Julio-Claudian nose. In grotesque imagery, the nose "always symbolizes the phallus" (Bakhtin, 1968: 316) and, further, in popular superstitions in medicine the size of the nose directly correlates to the size and potency of the phallus. Neronian portraits may not be going quite so far, but they exhibit the traits of grotesque figures in many ways and are clearly intended to be antithetical to the Julio-Claudian portraits of the previous emperors. The hair and the beard, too, break with Julio-Claudian iconography, resembling satyrs—hybrid, festive, grotesque creatures—more than the idealized deities the other emperors are modeled on. The curving whorls of Nero's hair are also reminiscent of the vegetable decoration used in the grotesque painting of the Domus Aurea, and the actual hairstyle itself suggests the hair style typically worn by charioteers, idols of popular culture.

Figure 5. Image source: McManus, Barbara. "Index of Images, Part I: Barbara F. McManus" *VRoma*. 1999 (updated 2013). Web. 28 July 2015. <http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/claudiusjupiter3.jpg>

The body of the emperor, like the body of the god it would become, was represented in accordance with conservative Roman aristocratic ideology combined with classical idealism: the body is a self-contained, closed system, ideal in proportion and eternally unchanged; it is perfect. For Claudius, we have his representation as Jupiter as an example of the Julio-Claudian ideal.

Figure 6. Chronography of 354. Image source: Pearse, Roger, ed. *Early Church Fathers - Additional Texts.* "The Chronography of 354 AD. Part 6: the calendar of Philocalus. Inscriptiones Latinae Antiquissimae, Berlin (1893) pp.256-278. Die Calenderbilder, Berlin (1888) figures 19, 20, 22-28, 30, 32." 16 June, 2007. Web. 29 July 2015.
<http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/chronography_of_354_06_calendar.htm>

There is a double Saturnalian reference going on here. First, the sentence of shooting dice is particularly Saturnalian, since only during the Saturnalia was this activity officially licensed. That dicing is particularly associated with the holiday can be seen in the (admittedly much later) Chronography of 354 (Figure 6), where the illustration shows a large pair of dice as the prominent activity and is captioned in part with the following: "nunc tibi cum domino ludere, verna, licet;" (now, slave, you are allowed to play (dice) with your master).

Figure 7. An amulet demonstrating the obscene "fig" gesture. Amulet image and identification: *Portable Antiquities Scheme*. 24 Feb. 2011. Web. 8 Jan 2016. <https://finds.org.uk/database/search/results/objecttype/amulet/broadperiod/ROMAN#>

Images from the popular-festive grotesque are called into play here as well. The fig may well be a sterile plant if you are a botanist, but the fig is commonly used in obscene expressions and hand gestures as an image of female genitalia or of phallic penetration of female genitalia. This is one of the central anatomical images of the grotesque's material bodily principle.

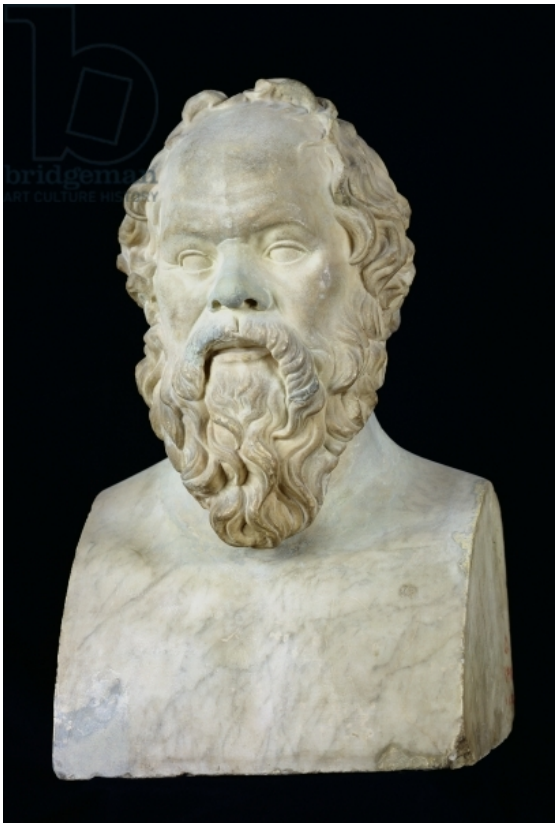

Figure 8. Bust of Socrates (470-399 BC) (marble), Lysippos (fl.370-310 BC) (after) / Louvre, Paris / Giraudon. Image Source: http://www.bridgemanimages.com/fr/asset/192430

The imagery of Alcibiades' abuse where he compares Socrates (Figure 8) to Silenus (Figure 9) and to Marsyas, both satyrs, saying that Socrates bears a striking resemblance to them both, goes even further to situate this festive scene and the character of Socrates in the world of the grotesque. Socrates' ugly appearance and satyr-like qualities, unusually, were preserved in his portraits soon after his death.

Figure 9. Silenus, infant Dionysus and Hermes, Greco-Roman fresco from Pompeii C1st A.D., Naples National Archaeological Museum. Source: http://www.theoi.com/Georgikos/Seilenos.html

Figure 10. Lycurgan portrait of Socrates. Small-scale Roman copy of an original of the late fourth century B.C. H: 27.5 cm. London, British Museum.
Source: Zanker (1995)
http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft3f59n8b0;chunk.id=d0e952;doc.view=print

This "official" portrait of Socrates goes as far as it can to reconciling the well-known features of the earlier, rebellious portrait, with the still dominant principles of kalokagathia: "the philosopher once likened to a silen now stands in Classical contrapposto pose, his body well proportioned,...devoid of any trace of the famed ugliness that his friends occasionally evoked, the fat paunch, the short legs, or the waddling gait" (Zanker, 1995: 60).

Figure 11. Philosopher/Aesop. Image source https://i.pinimg.com/originals/13/d8/23/13d8231e4887917c9850984ead3bcbf4.jpg

The grotesque representation of intellectuals in popular art can be seen as a long-standing tradition, Zanker (1995: 33) notes with two examples from "modest" Greek pottery. In both, the heads are greatly enlarged, and the grotesque sophist also has silenus-like features like the portrait of Socrates. The second (Figure 10), generally identified as Aesop (whose fable Socrates in Satire 4 references) likewise has a grotesquely large head and long, shaggy beard and hair.

Figure 12. Grotesque philosophers, including Socrates, House of the Physician in Pompeii. Image Source: https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/solomon-socrates-and-aristotle/

The popular grotesqueing of Socrates in Pompeii follows suit: the painting identified as Socrates in the House of the Physician (Figure 10) incorporates the silenus features typically attributed to the philosopher and, like the popular pottery, enlarges the figure's head and gives him short stubby legs to boot. The figure is grotesquely comical.

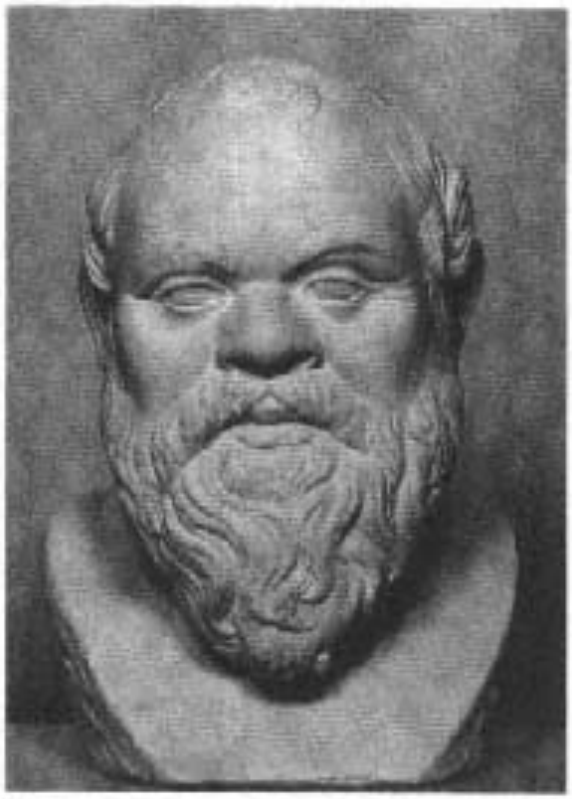

Figure 13. Socrates with a smile. Roman copy of a Greek original of ca. 380 B.C. (Type A). Naples, Museo Nazionale. (Cast)
Image Source: Zanker (1995)
http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft3f59n8b0;chunk.id=d0e41;doc.view=print.

A less extreme modification to the Socrates portrait can be seen in an Early Imperial bust. Unlike the original from which this copy was based, the Roman version adds a smile. Zanker (1995: 12) suggests that this innovation is an attempt to "humanize" the satyr features, but it rather seems more of a complement to them. Adding a smile to the portrait emphasizes Socrates' anti-establishment humor and irony, while it helps to put this relatively authentic portrait a little bit more in the comical world of the grotesque philosophers seen in Greek pottery and Roman wall painting.

Figure 14. Silenus and mask; Pompeii, Villa of the Mysteries. Image Source: http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/illustration/detail-of-fresco-depicting-silenus-with-satyrs-second-stock-graphic/148354823

The grotesque painting of Socrates bears a striking resemblance to Pompeian representations of actual Silenus figures, a classic example of which can be seen in the Villa of the Mysteries. Both Socrates and Silenus in these images are bald, paunchy, and misproportioned. In the Silenus image, Silenus' appearance is associated with the mask held directly over his head: the arching eyebrows, gaping mouths, flat, broad noses, the configuration of the beard and mustache, all serve to tie these two images closely together. Socrates in the House of the Physician shares most of these qualities too. The grotesque image of the silenus and the grotesque image of the mask go hand-in-hand...

Figure 15. Mask from the Room of Achilles on Scyros. Image source: Iacopi: 1999: 61)

Figure 16. Image sourceL Iacopi (1999: 150).

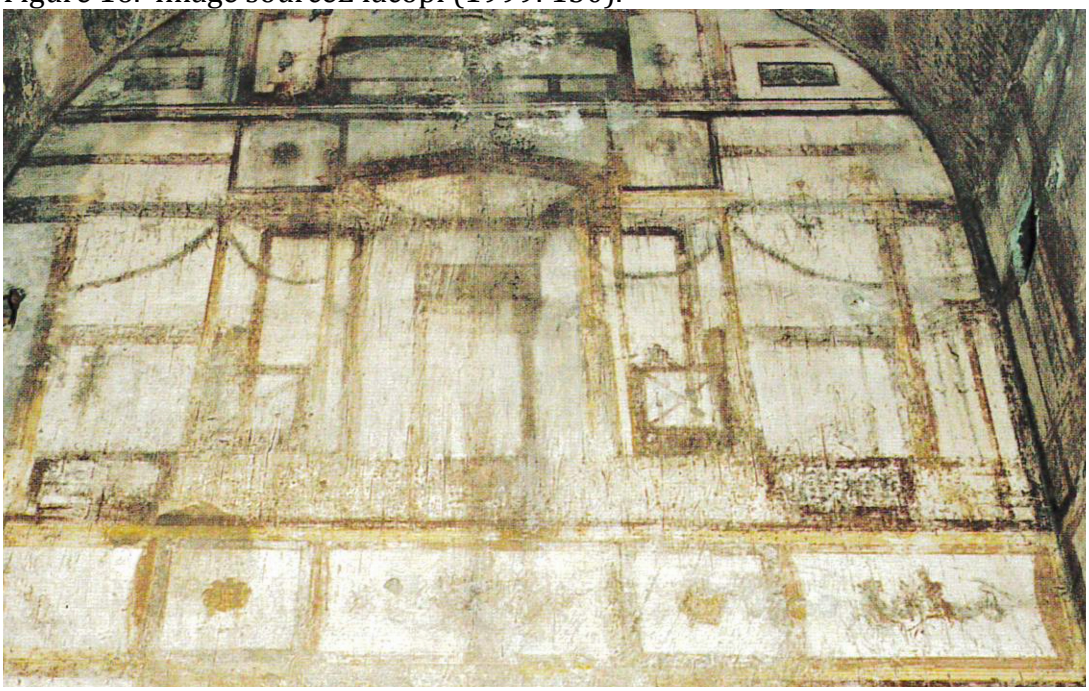

Figure 17. Room of the Masks in Nero's Domus Aurea. Image source: Iacopi (1999: 128)

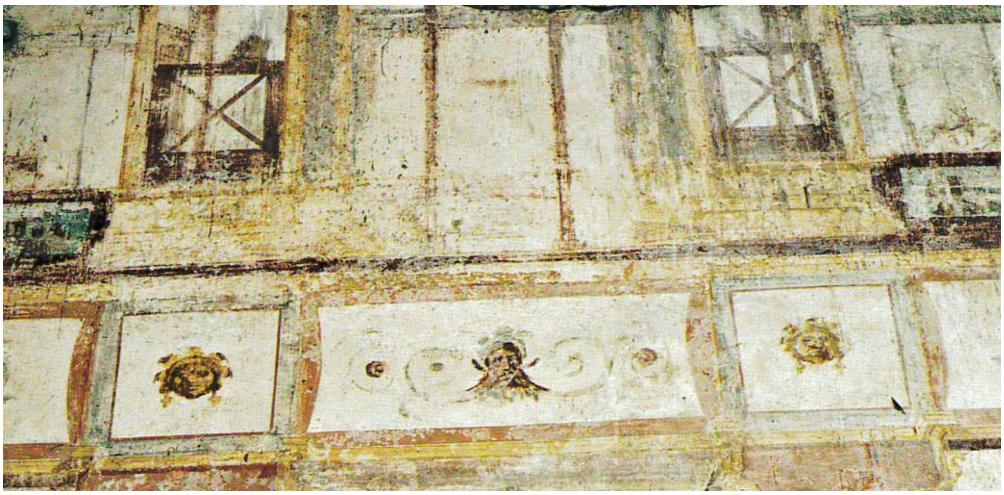

Figure 18. Room of the Masks in Nero's Domus Aurea. Image source: Iacopi (1999: 129)

The grotesque image of the silenus and the grotesque image of the mask go hand-in-hand, and masks like these are woven into the intricate, grotesque decorative scheme of the Golden House itself.

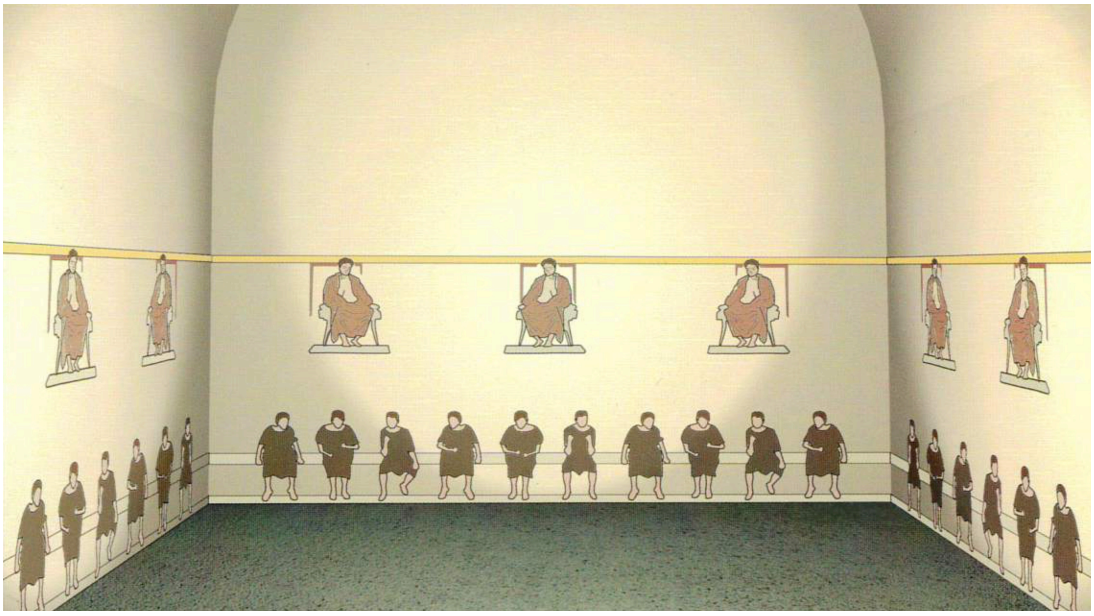

Figure 19. Digital reconstruction of the Caupona of the Seven Sages. Image source: Clarke (2007: 101).

Though only partially preserved, the entire program of the room can be reconstructed in its broad strokes, and the specifics are very illuminating. Three of the Seven Sages remain. Each Sage is elevated on a pedestal and painted as if a statue. On either side of the statue, in Greek, are the Sage's name and city. Underneath each Sage, written in Latin, is a single verse. Under Solon of Athens: "Ut bene cacaret, ventrem palpavit Solon" (To crap well, Solon massaged his belly); under Thales of Miletus: "durum cacantes monuit ut nitant Thales" (Thales advised those crapping a hard one to lean into it); and under Chilon of Lacedaemon: "vissire tacite Chilon docuit subdolus" (Tricky Chilon taught how to fart in silence). The other four Sages no doubt had more to teach on the subject of shitting and farting... Under the Seven Sages, in a ring around the caupona, are painted seated figures of men shitting, each with his own tagline such as "mulione sedes" (you are sitting on a mule driver); or "bene caca et irrima medicos" (shit good and fuck the doctors). The seated men ring the room on the two walls right and left of the entrance as well as the back wall. Essentially, the image is that of a public latrine. The juxtaposition of these images with food and drink is obviously intended to be funny, and it is along these lines, I think, that Trimalchio suggests to his guests that they feel free to do their business right there in the triclinium, though he himself excused himself from the room for such purposes and also tells them that his facilities stand at the ready.

Figure 20. Wisdom of the common man on bowel movements, Caupona of the Seven Sages. Image source: Clarke (2007: 103).

Figure 21. Wisdom of the Sages on bowel movements, Caupona of the Seven Sages. Image source: Clarke (2007: 99).

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